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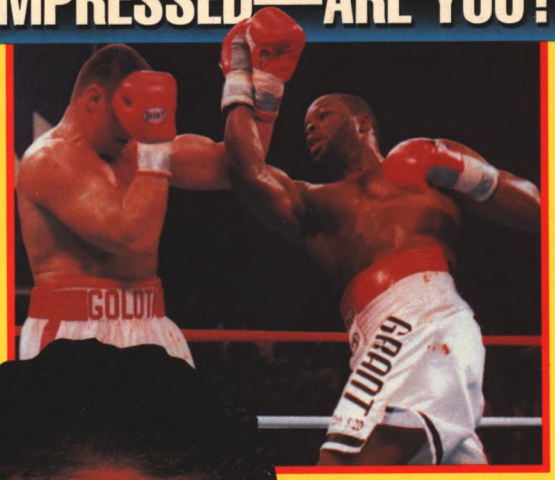

The Ring's Fighter Of The Year

PAULIE AYALA

"From Ali To Marciano To Tunney, I'm In Very Good Company"

THE GREATEST FIGHT I EVER SAW

Boxing's Best Writers' Everlasting Memories

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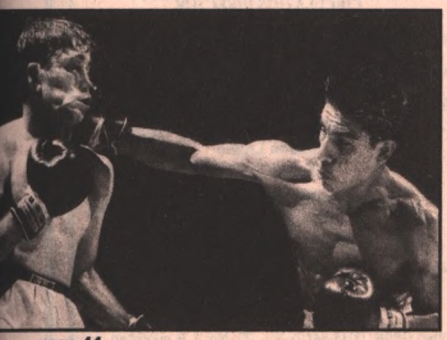

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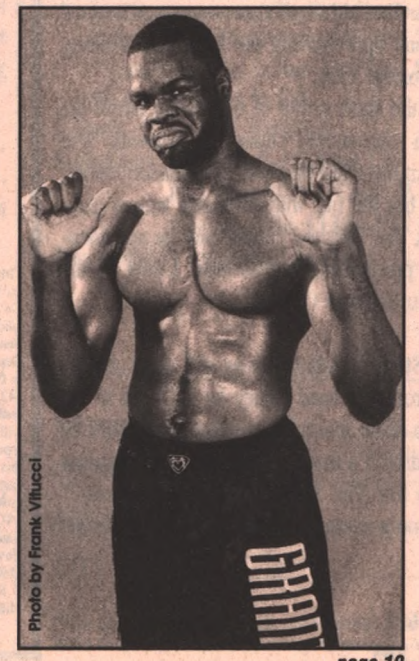

Photo by Frank Vitucci

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Cover:
Paulie Ayala by Chris Farina
Grant-Golota by Marty Rosengarten
Cover Design: Joseph Kalman

RINGSIDE

The reasons for Paulie Ayala's selection as THE RING's Fighter of the Year are delineated in this issue's cover story *(page 22)*, but perhaps it's a good idea to explain why some other fighters were *not* chosen.

We've received quite a lot of mail urging us to award the magazine's top honor to Felix Trinidad, and the WBC/IBF welterweight champion was certainly given serious consideration. After all, he beat both Pernell Whitaker and Oscar De La Hoya in '99, a pair of fighters who will most likely be enshrined in the Hall of Fame one day. But there's no getting around the fact that "Tito's" points win over "The Golden Boy" was very controversial. And when you also take into consideration the disappointing nature of the fight, it was impossible to recognize the winner as the year's best fighter.

Lennox Lewis was another strong candidate, and the fact that he unified the heavyweight championship weighed heavily in his favor. But like Trinidad, Lewis failed to impress in the two biggest fights of his career. On my scorecard, Lewis deserved to win both of his bouts with Evander Holyfield, but others disagree. Ironically, it was the rematch, in which the Englishman tallied a unanimous decision, that has caused the most debate. Practically everybody, except two of the three official judges, thought Lewis won the first fight, which ended in a scandalous draw, but there was considerable disagreement among both fans and media members about the rematch verdict. Had Lewis knocked out Holyfield or delivered a more compelling performance in either fight, he could very well have been our Fighter of the Year. But he didn't, a fact that has left the game's glamour division in a rather dreary state.

Others considered and rejected were Roy Jones, Steve Johnston, and Erik Morales. Jones only had two bouts in '99, and although his decision over Reggie Johnson made him the undisputed light heavyweight champion, the other was a shameful mismatch against the pitifully inept Rick Frazier. A persuasive case can be made for either Johnston or Morales; they both had great years. But although there were some good fighters among their victims, neither beat anyone approaching the stature of Johnny Tapia, whom Ayala topped in THE RING's Fight of the Year.

The accolade for Round of the Year goes to the sixth round of the De La Hoya-Ike Quartey fight, a sizzling session in which both men scored clean knockdowns. The Knockout of the Year was Derrick Jefferson's sixth-round blastout of Maurice Harris. There was plenty of competition for this honor, but the fact that Jefferson was in trouble when he threw the up-from-the-hip left hook that finished Harris and the spectacular fashion in which Harris fell made this one particularly memorable. Upset of the Year was Willy Wise's 10-round decision over Julio Cesar Chavez.

***

When the last month's issue went to press, Stephan Johnson was still alive. Sadly, he has since died of complications stemming from the head injury he suffered in his bout with Paul Vaden. It would be reassuring to think that such catastrophes could be totally eliminated, but after reading Robert Mladinich's investigative piece, "Anatomy Of A Ring Death: Is Anyone Really To Blame For The Stephan Johnson Tragedy?" *(page 48)*, it's difficult to be optimistic. The game's intrinsic danger is so great, no set of guidelines will ever make it completely safe.

Nigel Collins
Editor-in-Chief

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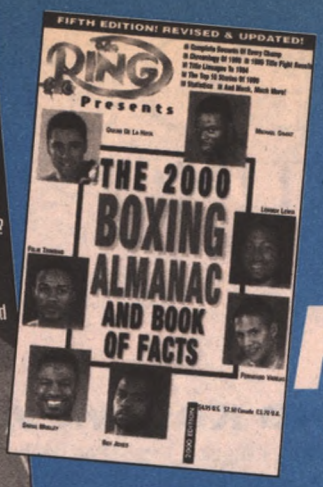

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COME OUT WRITING

We welcome your letters, which may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Send your comments to Come Out Writing, The Ring, P.O. Box 1148, Ft. Washington, PA 19034

FIGHTING KOSTYA WILL COST YA

As THE RING ratings suggest, there is no doubt Steve Johnston is the number-one lightweight in the world today. Johnston has been a fighting champ in 1999, and I certainly respect him for that. Let's hope he gives our top hope here in Australia, transplanted South African Lovemore Ndou, a title chance in the year 2000.

One thing, however, I don't think you'll see Johnston do is challenge Kostya Tszyu for the WBC super lightweight title. There are two reasons: 1) Kostya is dynamite against southpaws. Every southpaw he has met so far as a pro, and there have been a quite a few, has been destroyed; and 2) Johnston has acted as a sparring partner for Tszyu at different times and knows the score. Tszyu, a shortish, stocky fighter, would be down there with Johnston, and there is no doubt that he would be too strong and punch too hard for the lightweight champ.

IAN DYER
Victoria State, Australia

Photo by Frank Vitucci

Fernando Vargas is not better than fellow 154-pound champion David Reid, says reader Sergio Pineda. Vargas recently squeaked by with a questionable majority decision against veteran southpaw Winky Wright to retain the IBF junior middleweight title.

TITO'S NUMBER TWO

After I read Nigel Collins' "Ringside" column (January 2000), I was very disappointed. I recognize that Roy Jones is the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world, but I do not believe that Floyd Mayweather should be ranked higher than Felix Trinidad. "Tito" has been an undefeated world champion for over six years in the most competitive division in boxing, defeating seven world champions (Jake Rodriguez, Maurice Blocker, Hector Camacho, Yory Boy Campas, Fred Pendleton, Pernell Whitaker, and Oscar De La Hoya) and knocking three of them out, while making a total of 15 title defenses, 12 by kayo. We all know the victory over De La Hoya was the only disputed victory Tito has (by the way, I saw it for Trinidad, 115-114), but it is still a victory in the record book.

Let me remind you that Trinidad became the first fighter to clearly defeat Whitaker, an all-time great. I truly believe that he should be given THE RING Fighter of the Year belt. Let's forget that he's not an American fighter and let's be fair. I don't take anything away from Mayweather, who is a very talented fighter. But he is just a baby in diapers in career accomplishments compared to Trinidad.

ALBERTO VELEZ
Elizabeth, NJ

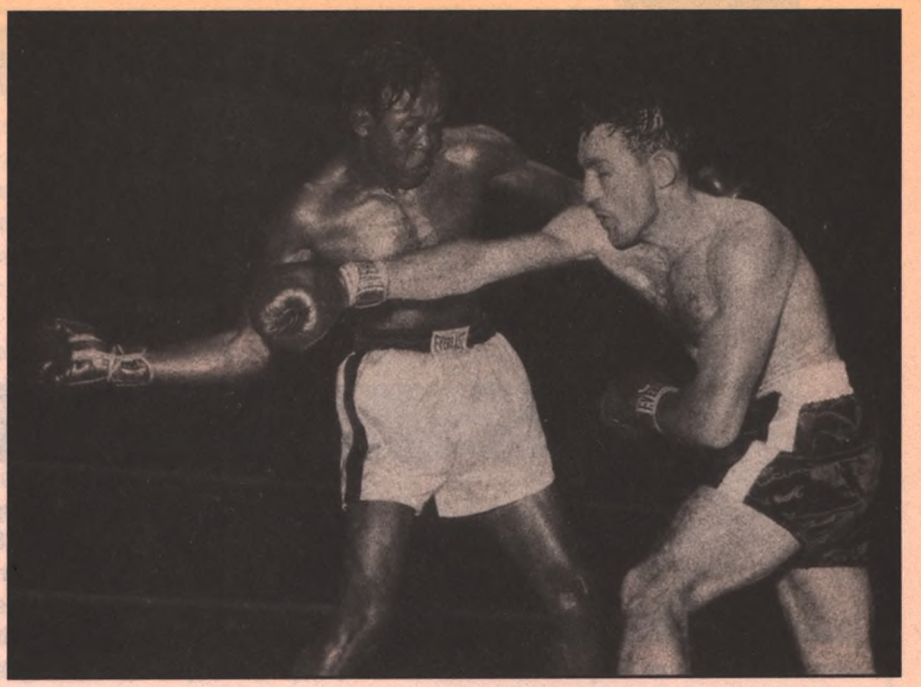
FLAILING FERNANDO

I read the letter from James Haudouglas in the January 2000 issue that said, "I predict a knockout [of David Reid]

at the hands of Fernando Vargas," and I had to laugh. Then Dr. Edward Martin wrote, "What an easy fight [Reid] would provide for Fernando Vargas." (Can I file a malpractice against this guy?) Unbelievably, these people think that Vargas is the better of the two. People think that Vargas can beat Oscar De La Hoya, Ike Quartey, Vernon Forrest, James Page, and Reid. Wait a minute. What about the great Winky Wright? Mr. Wright (not exactly a future Hall of Famer) utterly embarrassed Vargas in that poorly judged bout in which Wright clearly had Vargas beaten. Like they say, another black eye for a sport that's already blinded. That decision was just as bad as the first Evander Holyfield-Lennox Lewis fight.

Clearly, Vargas cannot fight when someone boxes him and consistently backs him up. His deficiencies, such as his lack of defense, were exposed. David Reid is a winner. He's young and still learning, but his raw talent is much greater than that of his peers. Those of us who had the privilege to see this young man take the gold in Atlanta understand. He is a special individual. Even so in a greater sense than Oscar De La Hoya, David Reid is truly golden.

SERGIO PINEDA
Hackensack, NJ



Then-welterweight champ Kid Gavilan rose from a second-round knockdown to beat Carmen Basilio in this 1953 brawl. Despite Gavilan's many accomplishments, reader John Murphy has serious doubts whether he should have been included among THE RING's "20 Greatest Fighters Of The 20th Century."

SOLID GOLDSTEIN

As a longtime boxing fan who has recently become active in the amateur ranks as a judge and referee, I would like to thank you for reprinting in the Holiday 1999 issue the August 1962 story "The Middle Man," by referee Ruby Goldstein. However, there is a part to this story about which I would like you to provide some additional information. Referee Goldstein closes the article with much confidence in himself and his abilities and expresses a desire and willingness to officiate his next bout, but the editor's note at the end of the article states that Goldstein never again worked a professional fight. Did the New York State Athletic Commission prevent him from working as a referee, or did he retire from officiating?

CHARLES EBERLE
Napoleon, OH

[Editor's note: Goldstein retired.]

YOU MUST BE KID-DING

I would like to comment on the article, "The 20 Greatest Fighters Of The 20th Century," in your October 1999 issue. You placed Kid Gavilan's name on your list at number 20. I disagree vehemently with that choice.

When you look back through the decades and examine all of the well-known boxers who have participated in the sport, you will find that they may be placed in five specific categories: great, very good, good, fair, and poor. I would place Gavilan in class two, a very good fighter, but definitely not a great one. Gavilan lacked the punching power and masterful boxing of Sugar Ray Robinson. He was not a great fighter.

JOHN MURPHY
Springfield, MA

IS TALENT ENOUGH?

In the January 1999 issue, Andrew Kang wrote a letter saying that Roy Jones, "the most naturally gifted fighter ever," deserved to be listed among the greatest fighters of the 20th century. But in boxing, the most gifted or talented is not necessarily the best. The great fighters have to have talent, of course, but they also have to have a combination of stamina, ability to withstand punishment, determination, and heart.

Let's match Jones against Archie Moore at light heavyweight. Roy is quicker, more talented, and more athletic. But what if Archie can withstand the best Jones can muster, as he did against Yvon Durelle? Then, in the later rounds, Moore lands the type of punch on Jones that floored Rocky Marciano. Remember, not-too-quick-handed Lou Del Valle dumped Roy with a left. So why wouldn't Moore land on Jones? And would Jones get up?

Or what if Jones fought Ray Robinson at middleweight. Robinson lands a left hook on Jones like the one that put rock-jawed Gene Fullmer into dreamland. Would Jones rise? How about Jones against Marvin Hagler? If Hagler continued to move forward and land hard shots without tiring, as was his style, would Jones win? Can't be too sure.

In boxing, talent alone doesn't always translate into the best or the greatest.

DR. BRENT CHESTER
Boca Raton, FL ■

ROUND ONE

HARRY GIBBS, 1920-1999

Henry Cooper led the tributes to British boxing's most respected and famous referee, Harry Gibbs, who died suddenly in November at age 79 while on holiday in Spain.

Cooper and Gibbs were at the center of one of the sport's great controversies when the tough London official gave Joe Bugner a decision in former British, Empire, and European heavyweight champion Cooper's final fight. Cooper and the vast majority of ringside and television observers thought he had won, and the pair did not speak again for over 25 years.

"It wasn't until about two years ago at a charity function that we actually acknowledged one another again," said Cooper. "The chairman agreed to put up £1,000 and collected £20 from everyone for Harry and I to shake hands. I don't hold grudges, and Harry and I saw each other several times since that night.

"I believe he made a mistake over that much-talked-about decision, but he was a good referee and a bit of a character, and he shall be missed. I am very sorry to hear of his passing."

Though Gibbs gave Bugner the nod over Cooper (below), the late ref (right) was eventually forgiven

Typically, Gibbs refused to the end to admit he made any error of judgment at Wembley Arena on that March night in 1971.

A dockers' foreman and a boxing enthusiast from his youth in pre-war London, Gibbs was among the first to volunteer at the outbreak of World War II, joining the Queen's Regiment. He was taken prisoner by the Germans before the retreat from Dunkirk. Three times he escaped from POW camps, but on each occasion was recaptured, and he remained captive for the duration of the war.

On his return, he became a professional fighter, engaging in six bouts before turning to coaching. His work in famous amateur clubs like Belsize, the Stock Exchange, and St. Pancras led to his appointment as coach for the London and, ultimately, England teams, but by the late-1950s, he had embarked on his illustrious career as a referee.

He officiated the Muhammad Ali-Brian London world heavyweight title fight at Earls Court in 1966 and also fights involving Sugar Ray Robinson, Sonny Liston, and Emile Griffith.

"He would move around both fighters, and you would never even know he was in the ring," said Brendan Ingle, a manager, trainer, and former fighter. "Without question, he was one of the best referees to come out of this country. He had a bearing about him that oozed authority and he was never afraid to read the riot act if a bout was becoming rough. He had the respect of everybody in the game."

Gibbs' service to boxing and tireless work for charity was rewarded with an OBE (Order of the British Empire) from the Queen. After his retirement as a referee, he continued to work as a judge and was one of the three ringside officials for the war between Marvin Hagler and Tommy Hearns in April 1985.

"He was one of those true Brits, very dependable with an independent spirit," said British Boxing Board general secretary John Morris, who collaborated on Gibbs' autobiography *Box On*. "We've lost a wonderful man, a great referee, and a fine friend. It really is a shock."

—Brian Doogan

A TRADE WORTH MAKING

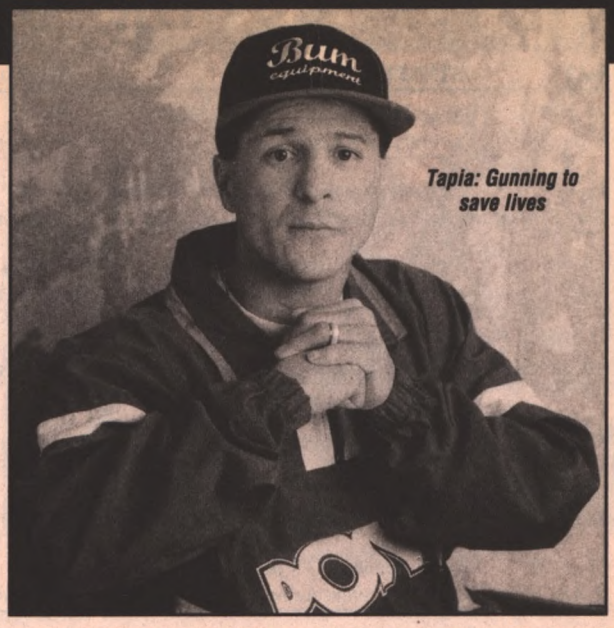
Nobody knows the pain that street violence can inflict better than Johnny Tapia, whose mother was murdered when he was still a boy. The anger and sorrow that resulted from her tragic death has never really gone away, leaving the two-division former champion still searching for a way to find inner peace. It was, therefore, ironically appropriate when Tapia announced a few weeks before Christmas that he was giving away two $30 tickets to his January fight with Jorge Eliecer Julio to anybody who turned in an unloaded gun to the Albuquerque, New Mexico, police.

"My wife, Teresa, and my cousin, Chris Chavez, came up with the idea," said Tapia. "We all realize how many people are killed and injured by guns. A lot of them are kids, too."

According to Tapia, the money for the tickets is coming out of his own pocket.

"When it comes to saving a life, money is no object. You can't put a price on somebody's life," said Tapia on the first day of his guns-for-tickets offer. "If we can get one out of every 100 guns on the street turned in, we've accomplished something worthwhile. We've already had 25 guns turned in today."

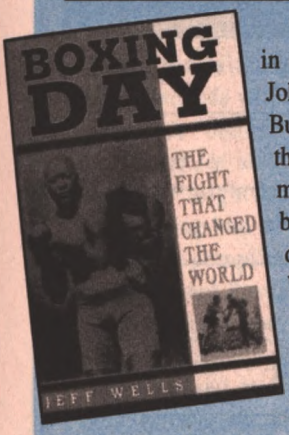
Although Tapia lost the WBA bantamweight title to Paulie Ayala in 1999's Fight of the Year, his innovative campaign to make life safer for the citizens of his hometown proves that you don't have to wear a title belt to be a champion.



Tapia: Gunning to save lives

—Nigel Collins

THE BOXING BOOKSHELF



"The Coon Arrives," warned the headline in one newspaper when America's Jack Johnson came to fight Canada's Tommy Burns for the heavyweight championship of the world in Sydney, Australia. The first modern heavyweight title match between a black man and a Caucasian happened the day after Christmas in 1908, and Jeff Wells' account of how it happened and the principal characters in the tense but often comic drama Down Under *Boxing Day: The Fight That Changed The World* (Harper Sports, 245 pages, $14.95 paperback) is highly readable, often droll, and never dull.

According to Wells, the five major players were Johnson, Burns, promoter Hugh D. "Huge Deal" McIntosh, novelist/reporter Jack London, whose subsequent public call for retired champ Jim Jeffries to come back and wipe the "golden smile" off the black champion Johnson's face was a bugle blast heard around the world, and an earnest Aussie bruiser called "Boshter" Bill Squires who, although "possessed of the dreaded crystal mandible," by losing three title bouts to Burns managed to set in motion the events that brought "Little General" Burns and Johnson together at Rushcutter's Bay. Wells leans heavily on period media accounts to tell their individual stories, and spices them with his own eye-catching historical perspectives, as in the case of the 5'7" Burns:

"So this garden gnome was now the toughest sonofabitch on the planet? Had the great [John L.] Sullivan spotted him in a saloon, he might have laughed enough to spill his beer. However, had he challenged Burns, the Boston Strongboy would soon have been rolling in the sawdust. A lot of big men in the history of the ring have suffered from underestimating sawn-off opponents."

But Johnson, of course, was one of the all-time greats, and Burns wasn't the only one in Sydney to have his hands full with the challenger. Wells recounts that Johnson had to be forced into the ring at gunpoint by McIntosh, under threat of death, after he held out for a bigger purse. Then he floored the champion five seconds into the "stoush" and pasted Burns monotonously until the cops ended it in round 14.

Wells is dead-on when he calls the "enduring tragedy of Burns-Johnson that the convergence of four phenomenal soldiers of fortune in Burns, Johnson, McIntosh, and London produced little more than a grubby racist campaign, the search for the 'Great White Hope.'" But he overreaches in stating that Johnson's subsequent legal troubles "all but instigated the new Jim Crow laws, some of which lasted half a century."

Also, there are some glitches in his narrative that stand out. For example, Wells says that in the seventh round of Burns vs. Squires in Paris—their second match—Boshter Bill "decked the world champion, albeit for only a second." Yet later in the book, we're told that in Burns-Squires III, in Sydney, Burns took a left to the chin in round two, "dropped and rolled onto his back. It was his first knockdown as champion."

But overall, this is a very entertaining account not only of one of the most significant fights and periods in ring history, but of the intriguing preliminaries to the main event as well.

—Pete Ehrmann

TV FIGHTS OF THE MONTH

DATE	WINNER/LOSER	NETWORK	DIVISION	SIGNIFICANCE	MATCHUP	RESULT
12-4-99	**Diego Corrales W 12 John Brown**	**HBO**	**IBF jl**	**A-**	**C+**	**B-**
Brown as tough as ever, but he couldn't have won this one with a stepladder						
12-4-99	**Fernando Vargas W 12 Winky Wright**	**HBO**	**IBF jm**	**A**	**B+**	**A-**
Vargas lucky to keep title after Wright takes it to him over 12 scintillating rounds						
12-5-99	Wolfgramm W 10 Calvin Lampkin	FOXSN	h	C	B+	C-
Sorry to say it, but the slimmed-down version of Wolfgramm isn't much better than the fat one						
12-10-99	Pat Coleman W 10 Jose Rivera	ESPN2	jm	C	C+	B
Coleman's early work enough to eke out majority decision in hard-fought bloodbath						
12-10-99	Billy Irwin KO 4 Jose Vida Ramos	ESPN2	l	B	C	C+
Another good win for one of Canada's best fighters; is Paul Spadafora next?						
12-10-99	Vivian Harris W 10 Gary St. Clair	ESPN2	jw	C+	C	C+
Prospect Harris cruises to win over late replacement						
12-11-99	Randall Bailey KO 9 Hector Lopez	Show	jw	B	C+	B
If there's a wildcard in the junior welter division, it's Bailey; this guy can crack						
12-11-99	**Byron Mitchell D 12 Bruno Girard**	**Show**	**WBA sm**	**B+**	**C-**	**B**
If Mitchell spent any more time posing, we'd think he was Michael Moorer						
12-11-99	Vitaly Klitschko KO 9 Obed Sullivan	Show	h	B	C+	C-
Call us cynical, but Klitschko can't be as dominant as Sullivan made him look						
12-11-99	Orlando Hollis W 8 Rudy Hernandez	PPV	w	C-	B+	B
Hernandez dominates early, but Hollis surges late to net close decision						
12-11-99	James Coker W 10 Urbano Gurrola	PPV	sm	C+	C+	D
Coker sleepwalks his way to easy win over passive Gurrola						
12-11-99	Carlos Contreras W 12 Carlos Navarro	PPV	jf	B	B	B+
Contreras scores big-time upset; good fight for a pay-per-view prelim						
12-11-99	Tony Ayala KO 8 Tony Menefee	PPV	sm	C+	C+	B-
Are we crazy, or can Ayala still fight? Menefee taken apart						
12-12-99	Robbie Peden W 10 Benito Rodriguez	FOXSN	jl	C-	B+	C-
On paper, a good test for young Peden; in application, a 10-round walkover						
12-12-99	**Bernard Hopkins W 12 Antwun Echols**	**FOXSN**	**IBF m**	**A**	**A-**	**A-**
Was there a more underappreciated, underpaid fighter in the '90s than Hopkins?						
12-17-99	Joe Mesi KO 1 Gary Winmon	ESPN2	h	C-	B	B
Mesi ambushes Winmon with barrage of power shots; good win for young prospect						
12-17-99	Willie Phillips KO 3 Carlton Johnson	ESPN2	h	D+	B	C
Behind on points, Phillips unleashes series of right hands to end it						
12-17-99	Jermell Barnes W 6 Britton Thomas	ESPN2	c	C	B+	C+
Undefeated Barnes not a bad fighter; in languid cruiser division, he could make noise						
12-17-99	**Paul Spadafora KO 11 Renato Cornett**	**ESPN2**	**IBF l**	**A-**	**C+**	**B-**
With his hair grown out, Spadafora even looks a little like Billy Conn; it's downright spooky						

Category Explanation: "Significance"—The importance of the bout to the division and the fighters' futures; "Matchup"—The quality of the fighters and the prefight determination of how their styles will mesh; "Result"—How the bout turned out, from the viewer's perspective.

(World title fights in **bold** type)

Division key: h—heavyweight; c—cruiserweight; lh—light heavyweight; sm—super middleweight; m—middleweight; jm—junior middleweight; w—welterweight; jw—junior welterweight; l—lightweight; jl—junior lightweight; f—featherweight; jf—junior featherweight; b—bantamweight; jb—junior bantamweight; fl—flyweight; jfl—junior flyweight; s—strawweight

Network key: PPV—Pay-Per-View; Show—Showtime; FOXSN—Fox SportsNet; Uni—Univision; Tel—Telemundo

THE BELT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

When Juan LaPorte tragically lost his son John in 1989, the former featherweight champion placed his WBC belt in John's coffin and buried it with his first-born son.

"The greatest achievement in my life was John," said LaPorte, whose son drowned at the age of nine. "The next greatest achievement was my title. I always told him that belt was his."

In December, WBC Secretary General Mario Latraverse presented LaPorte with a new championship belt. The ceremony took place during the annual Ring 8 holiday party at the Waterfront Crabhouse in New York City.

"Receiving this belt today makes an angel in the sky smile down at me," said LaPorte, a vice president of Ring 8. "Now he has one and I have one. This makes me very proud to be one of many WBC world champions."

Also at the holiday party, Ring 8's uncrowned champion belt was issued to former welterweight contender Joe Miceli. Miceli, who never received a title shot, met a dozen champions and beat Ike Williams (twice in non-title bouts), Johnny Saxton, and Virgil Akins, while drawing with Joey Giardello.

Also honored were Hall of Famer Carmen Basilio, historian Hank Kaplan, New York State Athletic Commission inspector Tony Mazzarella, and former fighters Danny Giovanelli, Vinny Cidone, and Charley Noel. With more than 300 dues-paying members, Ring 8 is the largest Veteran Boxers Association in the country.

—Robert Cassidy

Photo by Robert Cassidy

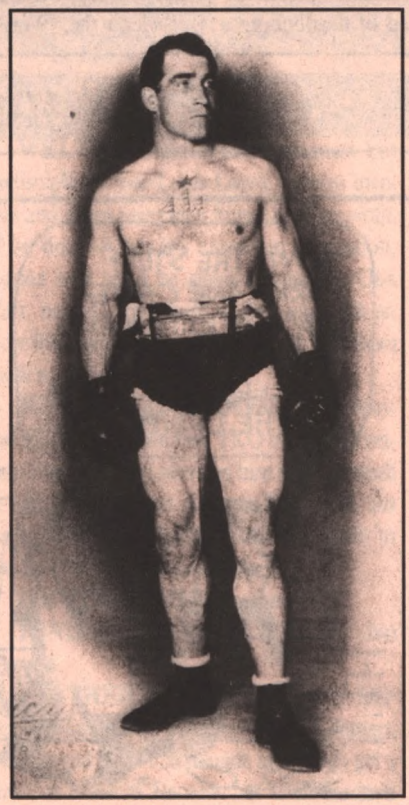
LaPorte receives new belt from WBC's Latraverse

SHARKEY ATTACK

The moguls of an outfit called TKO Records in San Francisco are lucky that "Sailor" Tom Sharkey has been gone for almost a half-century, else they might have thought twice before using him as the poster boy for their new compilation of punk rock songs entitled *Punch Drunk*.

Adorning the cover of the compact disc is a famous photo of the well-cauliflowered and tattooed Sharkey who, notwithstanding that he stood just 5'8" and went around 185 pounds, was one of the fiercest heavyweight fighters of all-time. Although he lost the decision in his November 3, 1899, heavyweight title fight with champion James J. Jeffries, some observers on the scene thought the ex-sailor took at least 18 of the 25 rounds that amounted to, in the words of an ancient headline in THE RING, "99 Minutes Of Hell." Said Jeffries ever-after of his toughest opponent: "They come no greater."

In spite of his 54 ring wars against the likes of Jeffries, Jim Corbett, and Bob Fitzsimmons, Sharkey's head was on straight right up to his death in 1953, a fact that he credited to a conditioning regimen that would probably croak some modern-day contenders. In fact, the headline of a story about Sailor Tom in a 1939 issue of *Colliers* magazine seems especially apropos in light of the use to which the punk rockers have put his image: "Only Punks Get Punch Drunk."



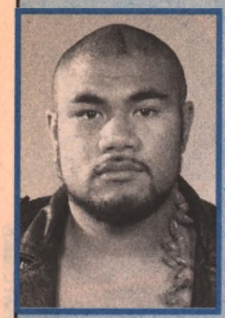
Sharkey is now a cover boy

On the subject of cover photos, a terrific one of Jerry and Mike Quarry fronts a new coffee-table book called "Brothers," by the editors of *Esquire* magazine. But other than a minuscule identification on the flyleaf of the late former heavyweight contender and his younger brother who challenged for the world light heavyweight title, there is no mention of the Quarrys at all in the text of the book about famous and not-so-famous brothers. So, *caveat emptor*.

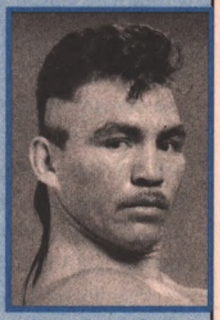
—Pete Ehrmann

OUTSIDE THE ROPES

We know **Mike Tyson** is a threat to opponents, but is he a danger to ferrets as well? Clark County (Las Vegas) officials were investigating possible neglect charges against Iron Mike after one ferret was found dead and another sick and scared when a volunteer ferret rescuer was called to Tyson's home in late-November. Tyson looked likely to escape unscathed, however, when one of his personal assistants, **Darryl Francis**, claimed ownership of the ferrets ... Heavyweight contender **Andrew Golota** suffered minor injuries and passenger **Tadeusz Godlewski** was killed when the Mercedes that Golota was driving collided with a truck in Davenport, Iowa, in mid-December. Golota was ticketed for failing to control his car ... IBF number-one ranked heavyweight **David Tua** left promoter Main Events in December and signed with America Presents, which also promotes Tyson ... Oft-arrested ex-heavyweight contender **Tommy Morrison** was thrown behind bars again on Thanksgiving Day, facing weapons and public intoxication charges after fleeing the scene of a car accident in Huntsville, Arkansas. A drunk Morrison ran into the woods after a Corvette in which he was riding (that police said contained several loaded handguns) veered off the road and into some trees. Morrison was found three hours later attempting to use a phone at a house less than a mile from the crash site ... Florida Judge **Alex Ferrer** issued an arrest warrant in early-December for Cuban amateur legend **Teofilo Stevenson** after the three-time Olympic gold medalist failed to appear in court for allegedly assaulting an airline employee in October. Stevenson was accused of headbutting a ticket agent who Stevenson said insulted Cuban President **Fidel Castro** ... Former heavyweight champ **Michael Moorer** was sued for $6.9-million by his grandfather, **Henry Smith**, in mid-December, money Smith felt he was owed for training Moorer until being fired in 1992. But just a week later, a federal jury in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, rejected Smith's claims ... The WBC stripped **Naseem Hamed** of its featherweight title in mid-December because he refused to give up his WBO belt ... Here's a positive sign for the sport of boxing: The ratings average for HBO's *Boxing After Dark* series for '99 was a 7.4, up more than a point from the previous year's 6.3 average ... Colorful former IBF featherweight champion **Jorge Paez**, 34, announced his retirement recently, having suffered knockout losses in his only two fights in '99. The Mexican Paez, who won the IBF title in '88 and made eight successful defenses before losing to **Tony Lopez** in '90, finishes with a record of 62-14-4 (41) ... Fantasy baseball and football leagues have long been a part of our sporting culture, and now boxing fans have an opportunity to join in on the fun thanks to a company called Fanatic Games. In their fantasy boxing league, which first started in July '99, each participant picks a roster of fighters and accumulates points based on actual results, vying for a grand prize of $500 and a personalized championship belt. You must be 18 or older to join. For information, contact Fanatic Games at 2040 Polk St., #217, San Francisco, CA 94109, call toll free at 1-877-4BOXFAN, send email to boxfanatic@aol.com, or check out their Web site at www.fanaticgames.com.



Tua: Signed up with America Presents



Paez: Colorful ex-champ calls it quits

THE PUNCHLINES

"By my not fighting as much, I've been preserved. I have taken less punishment. I'm like Grandma's peaches sitting on a shelf in the basement, collecting dust, waiting for my time."

—IBF middleweight champ Bernard Hopkins

"Mike ain't no ferret abuser. If we were neglecting or abusing them, we could have just thrown them over the fence into Wayne Newton's yard."

—Tyson assistant Darryl Francis

"It would establish Laila financially, and then I would establish her horizontally."

—Jacqui Frazier-Lyde, daughter of Joe Frazier, on a fight between her and Laila Ali

AL KRATZER'S VIEW

The RING®
"THE BIBLE OF BOXING"

RATINGS ANALYSIS

(For period ended December 28, 1999)

POUND-FOR-POUND

1. **ROY JONES**
   Light Heavyweight
2. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER**
   Junior Lightweight
3. **FELIX TRINIDAD**
   Welterweight
4. **OSCAR DE LA HOYA**
   Welterweight
5. **SHANE MOSLEY**
   Welterweight
6. **MARK JOHNSON**
   Junior Bantamweight
7. **RICARDO LOPEZ**
   Junior Flyweight
8. **ERIK MORALES**
   Junior Featherweight
9. **BERNARD HOPKINS**
   Middleweight
10. **STEVE JOHNSTON**
    Lightweight

HEAVYWEIGHTS: No changes.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: Former IBF champion Imamu Mayfield (eighth last issue) is gone after a draw with unheralded Louis Azille. Carl Thompson (10th last issue) takes over Mayfield's former spot, thanks to his kayo of Terry Dunstan. Canada's Dale Brown, who gave IBF boss Vassiliy Jirov a tough fight last year, moves into Thompson's old position.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: No changes.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: A switch at number 10: Mads Larsen exits to make room for England's Glenn Catley, who recently upset Eric Lucas.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Bernard Hopkins reinforces his standing as the best 160-pounder in the world with a sparkling win over hard-hitting Antwun Echols. Despite the loss, Echols stays at number five because of his very respectable attempt to unseat "The Executioner."

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Winky Wright did much better challenging Fernando Vargas for the IBF belt than Yory Boy Campas did defending it against "Ferocious Fernando." Therefore, they've traded places, with Wright moving up to sixth, and Campas moving down to seventh.

WELTERWEIGHTS: Talented but undisciplined Jose Louis Lopez remains inactive and drops one place from eighth to ninth. If he doesn't get his career in gear soon, Lopez will soon be gone altogether. Oba Carr, on the other hand, stays busy with an over-the-weight win, which pushes him from ninth to eighth.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: Randall Bailey's ninth-round TKO of rugged veteran Hector Lopez elevates him from seventh to fifth, which drops Antonio Diaz (fifth last issue) and Vince Phillips (formerly sixth) to sixth and seventh, respectively.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: No changes.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: Former IBF junior featherweight champ Vuyani Bungu, who moved up to 126 pounds in order to get a crack at Naseem Hamed, has been inactive since making his final title defense against Victor Llerena in February 1999. As a result, the gifted South African slips from third to fourth, and IBF titlist Paul Ingle (fourth last issue) advances to third.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Carlos Navarro's upset loss to journeyman Carlos Contreras sends him tumbling out of the ratings. Former WBC flyweight champ Manny Pacquiao, who continues to rise in weight, replaces Navarro at number eight.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: Two-division former champion Danny Romero (ninth last issue) departs after deciding to campaign as a junior feather. This allows busy Cuauhtemoc Gomez (10th last issue) to progress to ninth. In at 10th is Johnny Bredahl, who is scheduled to challenge WBA kingpin Paulie Ayala in March.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: No changes.

FLYWEIGHTS: Undefeated Mauricio Pastrana (third last issue) outgrows the division, but still hasn't settled on which weight class he'll campaign in. Consequently, Pastrana exits, and everybody formerly below him moves up a notch. Isidro Garcia comes aboard at the 10th slot.

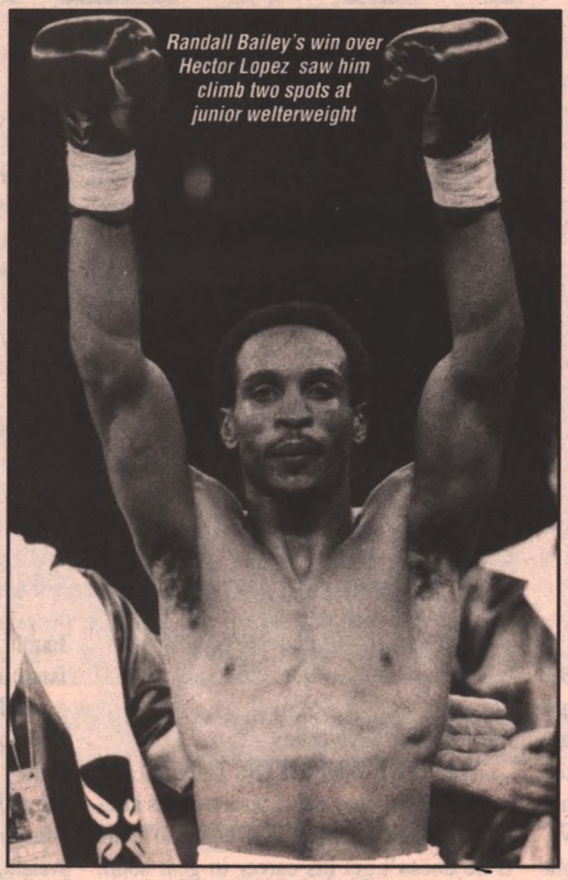
JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: No changes.

STRAWWEIGHTS: No changes.

POUND-FOR-POUND: No changes. ■

THE RING RATINGS

For Period Ended December 28, 1999



Randall Bailey's win over Hector Lopez saw him climb two spots at junior welterweight

How Our Ratings Are Compiled

In each division, fighters are ranked according to their abilities and accomplishments.

Being champion does not necessarily mean a fighter will be rated at the top of his weight class.

These ratings reflect how the best fighters in the world rate against one another.

Ratings By The Editors

Records By Fight Fax Inc.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
Weight Unlimited

1. **LENNOX LEWIS** England *35-1-1 (WBA/WBC/IBF Champ)*
2. **EVANDER HOLYFIELD** Fairburn, GA *36-4-1*
3. **MICHAEL GRANT** Norristown, PA *31-0*
4. **IKE IBEABUCHI** Dallas, TX *20-0*
5. **DAVID TUA** Totowa, NJ *35-1*
6. **MIKE TYSON** Catskill, NY *46-3*
7. **VITALY KLITSCHKO** Ukraine *27-0*
8. **ANDREW GOLOTA** Chicago, IL *34-4*
9. **DERRICK JEFFERSON** Detroit, MI *22-0-1*
10. **OLEG MASKAEV** Staten Island, NY *18-2*

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 154 pounds

1. **FERNANDO VARGAS** Oxnard, CA *18-0 (IBF Champ)*
2. **DAVID REID** Philadelphia, PA *14-0 (WBA Champ)*
3. **LAURENT BOUDOUANI** France *38-3-1*
4. **FRANCISCO CASTILLEJO** Spain *47-4 (WBC Champ)*
5. **HARRY SIMON** Namibia *18-0*
6. **WINKY WRIGHT** St. Petersburg, FL *39-3*
7. **YORY BOY CAMPAS** Mexico *74-3*
8. **KEITH MULLINGS** Brooklyn, NY *16-6-1*
9. **BRONCO McKART** Monroe, MI *39-2*
10. **TONY MARSHALL** Albany, NY *33-7-6*

FEATHERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 126 pounds

1. **NASEEM HAMED** England *33-0 (WBC Champ)*
2. **FRED NORWOOD** St. Louis, MO *35-0-1 (WBA Champ)*
3. **PAUL INGLE** England *22-1 (IBF Champ)*
4. **VUYANI BUNGU** South Africa *37-2*
5. **CESAR SOTO** Mexico *53-8-2*
6. **LUISITO ESPINOSA** Philippines *44-8*
7. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ** Mexico *30-2*
8. **JULIO PABLO CHACON** Argentina *36-0*
9. **MANUEL MEDINA** Mexico *56-11*
10. **MBULELO BOTILE** South Africa *26-1*

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 122 pounds

1. **ERIK MORALES** Mexico *35-0 (WBC Champ)*
2. **MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA** Mexico *49-2*
3. **NESTOR GARZA** Mexico *37-1 (WBA Champ)*
4. **LEHLO LEDWABA** South Africa *29-1-1 (IBF Champ)*
5. **WAYNE McCULLOUGH** Las Vegas, NV *23-3*
6. **ENRIQUE SANCHEZ** Mexico *25-1-1*
7. **ANTONIO CERMENO** Venezuela *34-3*
8. **MANNY PACQUAIO** Philippines *26-2*
9. **JUAN CARLOS RAMIREZ** Mexico *18-2*
10. **MICHAEL BRODIE** England *27-0*

BANTAMWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 118 pounds

1. **TIM AUSTIN** Cincinnati, OH *20-0-1 (IBF Champ)*
2. **PAULIE AYALA** Ft. Worth, TX *29-1 (WBA Champ)*
3. **JOHNNY TAPIA** Albuquerque, NM *46-1-2*
4. **VEERAPOL SAHAPROM** Thailand *23-1 (WBC Champ)*
5. **NANA KONADU** Ghana *40-4-1*
6. **JORGE ELIECER JULIO** Colombia *42-1*
7. **JULIO GAMBOA** Nicaragua *24-4*
8. **ADAN VARGAS** Mexico *32-1-1*
9. **CUAUHTEMOC GOMEZ** Mexico *46-7*
10. **JOHNNY BREDAHL** Denmark *45-1*

CRUISERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 190 pounds

1. **JUAN CARLOS GOMEZ**
   Germany 29-0 (WBC Champ)
2. **FABRICE TIOZZO**
   France 41-1 (WBA Champ)
3. **VASSILIY JIROV**
   Kazakhstan 22-0 (IBF Champ)
4. **JOHNNY NELSON**
   England 36-12-1
5. **MARCELO DOMINGUEZ**
   Argentina 29-3-1
6. **ARTHUR WILLIAMS**
   Pensacola, FL 32-5-1
7. **JAMES TONEY**
   Las Vegas, NV 58-4-2
8. **CARL THOMPSON**
   England 25-5
9. **SAUL MONTANA**
   Mexico 33-6
10. **DALE BROWN**
    Canada 18-1-1

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
Weight limit: 175 pounds

1. **ROY JONES**
   Pensacola, FL 40-1 (WBC/WBA/IBF Champ)
2. **DARIUSZ MICHALCZEWSKI**
   Germany 41-0
3. **LOU DEL VALLE**
   Bronx, NY 28-2
4. **REGGIE JOHNSON**
   Houston, TX 40-6-1
5. **GRACIANO ROCCHIGIANI**
   Germany 40-4-1
6. **MICHAEL NUNN**
   Davenport, IA 54-4
7. **ERIC HARDING**
   Philadephia, PA 18-0-1
8. **ANTONIO TARVER**
   Orlando, FL 14-0
9. **DAVID TELESCO**
   Port Chester, NY 23-2
10. **MONTELL GRIFFIN**
    Chicago, IL 38-3

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 168 pounds

1. **SVEN OTTKE**
   Germany 17-0 (IBF Champ)
2. **JOE CALZAGHE**
   Wales 27-0
3. **BYRON MITCHELL**
   Ozark, AL 20-0-1 (WBA Champ)
4. **MARKUS BEYER**
   Germany 17-0 (WBC Champ)
5. **CHARLES BREWER**
   Philadelphia, PA 34-6
6. **THOMAS TATE**
   Houston, TX 36-6
7. **FRANKIE LILES**
   N. Hollywood, CA 32-3
8. **RICHIE WOODHALL**
   England 25-2
9. **ROBIN REID**
   England 26-2-1
10. **GLENN CATLEY**
    England 25-3

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 160 pounds

1. **BERNARD HOPKINS**
   Philadelphia, PA 36-2-1 (IBF Champ)
2. **WILLIAM JOPPY**
   Washington, D.C. 28-1-1 (WBA Champ)
3. **KEITH HOLMES**
   Washington, D.C. 34-2 (WBC Champ)
4. **HASSINE CHERIFI**
   France 28-3-1
5. **ANTWUN ECHOLS**
   Davenport, IA 22-3-1
6. **OTIS GRANT**
   Canada 31-2-1
7. **ROBERT McCRACKEN**
   England 33-0
8. **ARMAND KRAJNC**
   Sweden 22-0
9. **DAVEY HILTON**
   Canada 37-1-3
10. **BERT SCHENK**
    Germany 23-0

WELTERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 147 pounds

1. **FELIX TRINIDAD**
   Puerto Rico 36-0 (IBF/WBC Champ)
2. **OSCAR DE LA HOYA**
   Whittier, CA 31-1
3. **IKE QUARTEY**
   Ghana 34-1-1
4. **JAMES PAGE**
   Pittsburg, CA 25-3 (WBA Champ)
5. **PERNELL WHITAKER**
   Norfolk, VA 41-3-1
6. **SHANE MOSLEY**
   Pomona, CA 33-0
7. **VERNON FORREST**
   Atlanta, GA 30-0
8. **OBA CARR**
   Detroit, MI 49-3-1
9. **JOSE LUIS LOPEZ**
   Mexico 42-4-2
10. **SHANNAN TAYLOR**
    Australia 25-0-1

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 140 pounds

1. **SHARMBA MITCHELL**
   Washington, D.C. 46-2 (WBA Champ)
2. **KOSTYA TSZYU**
   Australia 23-1-1 (WBC Champ)
3. **TERRONN MILLETT**
   St. Louis, MO 22-1-1 (IBF Champ)
4. **ZAB JUDAH**
   Brooklyn, NY 21-0
5. **RANDALL BAILEY**
   Miami, FL 20-0
6. **ANTONIO DIAZ**
   Coachella, CA 29-2
7. **VINCE PHILLIPS**
   Las Vegas, NV 40-4
8. **MICKEY WARD**
   Lowell, MA 34-9
9. **ARTURO GATTI**
   Jersey City, NJ 30-4
10. **SHEA NEARY**
    England 22-0

LIGHTWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 135 pounds

1. **STEVE JOHNSTON**
   Denver, CO 29-1 (WBC Champ)
2. **ANGEL MANFREDY**
   Gary, IN 28-4-1
3. **PAUL SPADAFORA**
   Pittsburgh, PA 28-0 (IBF Champ)
4. **CESAR BAZAN**
   Mexico 36-3-1
5. **IVAN ROBINSON**
   Philadelphia, PA 29-3
6. **GILBERT SERRANO**
   Venezuela 18-4-2 (WBA Champ)
7. **COLIN DUNNE**
   England 29-1
8. **ARTUR GRIGORIJAN**
   Uzbekistan 28-0
9. **ISRAEL CARDONA**
   Hartford, CT 31-3
10. **STEFANO ZOFF**
    Italy 28-7-2

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 130 pounds

1. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER**
   Grand Rapids, MI 22-0 (WBC Champ)
2. **DIEGO CORRALES**
   Sacramento, CA 30-0 (IBF Champ)
3. **JONGKWON BAEK**
   South Korea 21-0 (WBA Champ)
4. **ROBERTO GARCIA**
   Oxnard, CA 32-1
5. **LAKVA SIM**
   Mongolia 11-2-1
6. **YONG SOO CHOI**
   South Korea 26-3-1
7. **JESUS CHAVEZ**
   Austin, TX 29-1
8. **ACELINO FREITAS**
   Brazil 23-0
9. **DERRICK GAINER**
   Pensacola, FL 33-4
10. **GOYO VARGAS**
    Mexico 39-6-1

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 115 pounds

1. **MARK JOHNSON**
   Washington, D.C. 38-1 (IBF Champ)
2. **IN JOO CHO**
   South Korea 16-0 (WBC Champ)
3. **HIDEKI TODAKA**
   Japan 16-2-1 (WBA Champ)
4. **JESUS ROJAS**
   Venezuela 33-7-3
5. **GERRY PENALOSA**
   Philippines 40-2-2
6. **YOKTHAI SITHOAR**
   Thailand 18-1-1
7. **LUIS BOLANO**
   Colombia 31-0
8. **RATANACHAI VORAPIN**
   Thailand 35-4
9. **JOEL LUNA-ZARATE**
   Mexico 32-3-2
10. **ERIC MOREL**
    Madison, WI 23-0

FLYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 112 pounds

1. **SORNPICHAI KRATCHINGDAENG**
   Thailand 17-0 (WBA Champ)
2. **MEDGOEN 3K-BATTERY**
   Thailand 19-0 (WBC Champ)
3. **CHATCHAI DUTCHBOY GYM**
   Thailand 34-2
4. **IRENE PACHECO**
   Colombia 23-0 (IBF Champ)
5. **LEO GAMEZ**
   Venezuela 32-7-1
6. **HUGO SOTO**
   Argentina 50-6-2
7. **JOSE BONILLA**
   Venezuela 25-5
8. **SAEN SOR PLOENCHIT**
   Thailand 33-1
9. **ALEJANDRO MONTIEL**
   Mexico 40-3
10. **ISIDRO GARCIA**
    Los Angeles, CA 20-1-1

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 108 pounds

1. **RICARDO LOPEZ**
   Mexico 48-0-1 (IBF Champ)
2. **YEOSAM CHOI**
   South Korea 21-1 (WBC Champ)
3. **ROSENDO ALVAREZ**
   Nicaragua 26-1-1
4. **PICHITNOI C. SIRIWAT**
   Thailand 21-1 (WBA Champ)
5. **SAMAN SORJATURONG**
   Thailand 40-3-1
6. **BABY JAKE MATLALA**
   South Africa 50-10-2
7. **MELCHOR COB CASTRO**
   Mexico 58-6-4
8. **WILL GRIGSBY**
   St. Paul, MN 14-2-1
9. **JOMA GAMBOA**
   Philippines 26-4-1
10. **MICHAEL CARBAJAL**
    Phoenix, AZ 49-4

STRAWWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 105 pounds

1. **ZOLANI PETELO**
   South Africa 15-2-2 (IBF Champ)
2. **WANDEE CHOR CHAREON**
   Thailand 23-3 (WBC Champ)
3. **CHANA PORPAOIN**
   Thailand 39-1
4. **NOEL ARAMBULET**
   Venezuela 11-1-1(WBA Champ)
5. **SONGKRAM PORPAOIN**
   Thailand 20-2-1
6. **JOSE GARCIA**
   Colombia 22-4-1
7. **ROCKY LIN**
   Philippines 26-2
8. **JOSE AGUIRRE**
   Mexico 21-1-1
9. **KERMIN GUARDIA**
   Columbia 32-2
10. **OSWALDO GUERRERO**
    Mexico 27-5

RYAN OUT LOUD

By Jeff Ryan

FROM MY BAR STOOL TO YOURS

Boxing will always be a great topic for tap room conversation. Occasionally, I'll bump into a fan who wants to hear more about what goes on away from the arena than who's going to beat whom inside of it. What follows, in no particular order, are my 10 favorite boxing stories. They make my list not because they're particularly funny or poignant, but because they remind me that the fistic world is forever an entertaining and unpredictable place. And, sometimes, even a surreal one.

1) Something I said?: While in Las Vegas several years ago, I learned that '70s heavyweight contender Ron Lyle was working as a security guard at The Dunes. One afternoon, I went to the casino to interview him. Lyle, who was on duty at the time, was unfriendly and abrasive. So don't ask me why, after noticing that Lyle was the only uniformed guard in the casino not carrying a gun, I was stupid enough to ask him if that was because he had once been incarcerated for manslaughter.

The 6'5" Lyle, who could strike fear into your bones even if his chest wasn't as wide as the hotel lobby, pointed a finger in my face and didn't stop screaming at me until he walked over to the cashier's window to pick up several stacks of chips. He then said, "Follow me," and led me into a restricted area among the blackjack tables. Nice setup. Within seconds, a pit boss was yelling at me to get the hell out of there. That was the only time all day that I saw Lyle smiling.

The ever-humble Leonard convinced his girlfriend to pose for THE RING

2) And you're not!: Sugar Ray Leonard is so vain, I bet he thinks that song is about him. After visiting with the five-division champ at his Maryland home, a photographer and I were saying our goodbyes in his driveway. Leonard was still wearing makeup from our photo shoot, and when his girlfriend unexpectedly drove up, he insisted that we take a photo of him and her together.

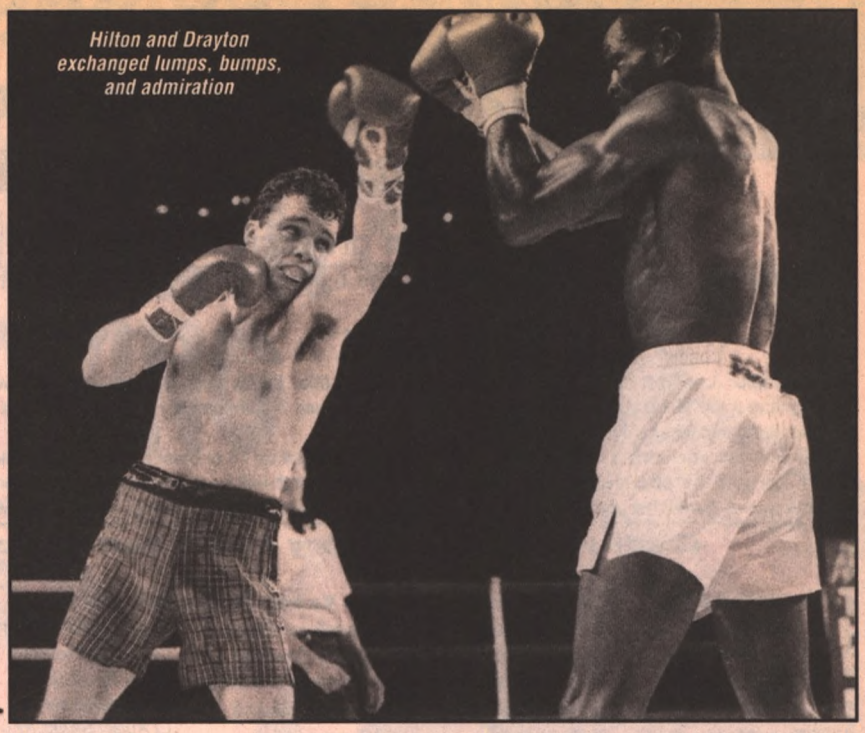
The flustered beauty protested, telling her man, "That's not fair. You have makeup on and I don't."

A bemused Leonard smiled and then matter-of-factly reminded her, "Hey, I'm *Ray*."

3) The King and I: My longest conversation ever with the highly visible but purposely inaccessible Don King came in his temporary office in Atlantic City when I was working on a story about the turbulent career of heavyweight Tim Witherspoon. King answered every question at maximum volume so as to get a rise out of the nearby sycophants, who chimed in repeatedly like a Greek chorus. Finally, King grew tired of being queried about his role in Witherspoon's financial troubles and said, "Now why is a young, well-educated white man like you asking me a question like that?"

4) Check, please: Big George Foreman turned a waitress into a nervous wreck one afternoon when we were having lunch near his home in Humble, Texas. When she brought the check to our table and asked, "Who gets this," Foreman responded, "Give it to the better-looking guy." Sad to report that not even the advantage of a full head of hair and 60 fewer pounds could convince her that guy was me.

5) Momma's boy: Most fighters are extremely close to their mothers, a fact that was evident when I hung out at Tony Lopez' California training camp prior to his 1990 bout with Jorge Paez. It was a Sunday, a day off from training, and Lopez' family had come to visit him at the apartment where he was staying. After speaking with the fighter throughout the day, we sat down and continued our interview while watching a Raiders-Broncos game on TV. When Lopez failed to answer me at one point, I looked over and saw that he was stretched out on the couch, his head cradled in his mother's lap. *Zzzz.* He was sleeping like a newborn baby.



Hilton and Drayton exchanged lumps, bumps, and admiration

6) Gas crisis: It wasn't the smell of battle that was in the air when I made my way through the makeshift stadium at Caesars Palace after the Marvin Hagler-Thomas Hearns shootout. Walking directly in front of me was a famous Hollywood star who—lucky me—decided to pass wind and then cackle with pride like a third-grader who'd just ripped one while the class was lining up for a fire drill. The air polluter shall remain nameless, but here's a hint: He starred in *Jaws*, and he's not Richard Dreyfuss or Robert Shaw.

7) The dress code is casual: Boxing personalities really get gussied up when they know Ryan is due to arrive. Hall of Fame heavyweight Floyd Patterson greeted me in an undershirt with a big hole in it. Then-heavyweight champion Michael Moorer consented to a Q & A, but insisted that we keep the lights out and the blinds drawn in his hotel room, and that he remain in bed with the covers pulled up to his neck. What the heck, at least that was better than WBC light heavyweight king Jeff Harding doing his interview while clad in only a pair of briefs and a Crocodile Dundee hat.

8) Since you brought that up ... : No promotion was more fun to cover than Hector Camacho vs. Vinny Pazienza. The bout was hardly a classic, but when we're talking about those two guys, since when is the bout the story? The prefight hype featured everything from Pazienza presenting his rival with a pink tutu to Camacho throwing a sanitary napkin at the Rhode Islander and calling him "a bleeder."

Paz upset gay activists when he told Camacho to leave his "sissy clothes" at home, and Camacho upset Paz' trainer, Kevin Rooney, by slapping him at a press conference. The best moments came after Camacho's decision win, however. That's when "The Macho Man" explained that in order to make the weight, "I took so many suppositories that I thought I was gonna get hemorrhoids." He then announced that he was going to "go get laid" and leaned into the microphone to deliver a farewell belch.

9) Blood brothers: The respect fighters have for each other is unique (even if they don't always want to admit it), and it was never more apparent to me than on a rainy Saturday afternoon at the Montreal Forum. In the bowels of the old arena, in a dreary corridor where they parked the Zamboni machine and stored billboards, junior middleweights Matthew Hilton and Buster Drayton sat side by side, laughing, hugging, and patting each other's head.

If you hadn't just watched them do a Rock 'Em, Sock 'Em Robots imitation for 15 rounds, you'd have thought they were old Army buddies or best friends. The two warriors shared the kind of warm feelings Hilton could only have for a guy who'd left his face red and puffy, and Drayton could only feel for a kid whose left hook had broken two of his ribs.

If anyone doesn't understand that, they don't understand boxing.

10) The Ol', uh, *Young* Mongoose: An afternoon in the company of Archie Moore was expected to be a strange experience, but not nearly as strange as it turned out to be. For the setting of our interview, the light heavyweight great chose fight manager Mort Sharnik's hotel suite, which featured all the tranquility of a Mexico City bus depot. While Moore spoke about flooring Rocky Marciano and training George Foreman, Sharnik was getting his feet massaged by a hotel employee, a drop-dead gorgeous secretary for Foreman's promoter was doing paperwork on the bed, and one of Foreman's camp members was walking around the room in his underwear.

Amid this scene, and in mid-sentence, the 76-year-old Moore sprang out of his chair and began shadowboxing as fast as he could. Gasping for air, he sat back down after about a minute. A few minutes later, though, he was up again, firing punches with incredible quickness for a guy old enough to be Foreman's father.

"I can still do 10 rounds of this," he said. "You just don't have the time to wait for it."

You think covering yachting provides a guy with memories like these? ■

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Example: Lennox Lewis KOs David Tua to defend his title. Lewis picks up 3 points for the win, 1 for the KO, 1 for defending his title, and 1 for fighting a top 10 contender, for a total of 6 points. Tua loses 3 points for the loss and 1 for the KO, but gains 1 point for fighting a champ resulting in a loss of 3 points

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- ❑ Mark Johnson
- ❑ Roy Jones Jr.
- ❑ Floyd Mayweather
- ❑ Erik Morales
- ❑ Shane Mosley
- ❑ Felix Trinidad

Lots of Hype
- ❑ Tony Ayala
- ❑ Naseem Hamed
- ❑ Lennox Lewis
- ❑ Ricardo Lopez
- ❑ David Reid
- ❑ Johnny Tapia
- ❑ Mike Tyson
- ❑ Fernando Vargas

Take My Belt, Please
- ❑ Jongkwon Baek
- ❑ Javier Castillejo
- ❑ Lehonolo Ledwaba
- ❑ Manuel Medina
- ❑ Teronn Millett
- ❑ Jesus Rojas
- ❑ Paul Spadafora
- ❑ Stefano Zoff

Let's See More
- ❑ Lamon Brewster
- ❑ Dennis Holbaek
- ❑ Kofi Jantuah
- ❑ Lemuell Nelson
- ❑ Augie Sanchez
- ❑ Cory Spinks
- ❑ Michael Trabant
- ❑ Adan Vargas

Solid
- ❑ Lou Del Valle
- ❑ Willie Jorrin
- ❑ Wladimir Klitschko
- ❑ Andrew Lewis
- ❑ Kevin Palmer
- ❑ Shannan Taylor
- ❑ Goyo Vargas
- ❑ Angel Vazquez

On The Verge
- ❑ Hector Camacho Jr.
- ❑ Joel Cassamayor
- ❑ Guty Espadas Jr.
- ❑ Acelino Freitas
- ❑ Zab Judah
- ❑ Diego Morales
- ❑ Eric Morel
- ❑ Harry Simon

Wearing a Belt
- ❑ Tim Austin
- ❑ Paulie Ayala
- ❑ In Joo Choo
- ❑ Diego Corrales
- ❑ Stevie Johnston
- ❑ Freddie Norwood
- ❑ Irene Pacheco
- ❑ Kastya Tszyu

Not Enough Hype
- ❑ Randall Bailey
- ❑ Mbulelo Botile
- ❑ Johnny Bredahl
- ❑ Will Grigsby
- ❑ Lovemore N'Dou
- ❑ Mamdou Thiam
- ❑ Clinton Woods
- ❑ Winky Wright

Let's See Less
- ❑ Henry Akinwande
- ❑ Hector Camacho
- ❑ Julio Cesar Chavez
- ❑ Arturo Gatti
- ❑ Kennedy McKinney
- ❑ Brian Nielsen
- ❑ Rafael Ruelas
- ❑ Pernell Whitaker

Still Got Something
- ❑ Laurent Boudouani
- ❑ John Brown
- ❑ Michael Carbajal
- ❑ Antonio Cermeno
- ❑ Luisito Espinosa
- ❑ Angel Manfredy
- ❑ Wayne McCullough
- ❑ Gerry Penalosa

Second to One
- ❑ Marco A. Barrera
- ❑ Nestor Garza
- ❑ Keith Holmes
- ❑ Evander Holyfield
- ❑ William Joppy
- ❑ D. Michalczewski
- ❑ Sharmba Mitchell
- ❑ James Page

Top Contenders
- ❑ Pablo Chacon
- ❑ Antwun Echols
- ❑ Vernon Forrest
- ❑ Roberto Garcia
- ❑ Michael Grant
- ❑ Ike Quartey
- ❑ Antonio Tarver
- ❑ David Tua

Could Be A Force
- ❑ Antonio Diaz
- ❑ Vitaly Klitschko
- ❑ Artur Grigorian
- ❑ Ahmed Kotiev
- ❑ Michael Nunn
- ❑ Hasim Rahman
- ❑ Leonard Townsend
- ❑ Michael Trabant

More Contenders
- ❑ Jesus Chavez
- ❑ Derrick Gainer
- ❑ Eric Harding
- ❑ Juan Marquez
- ❑ Robert McCracken
- ❑ Bronco McKart
- ❑ G. Rocchigiani
- ❑ David Telesco

Solid II
- ❑ Chris Byrd
- ❑ Lincoln Carter
- ❑ Darrel Coley
- ❑ Michael Covington
- ❑ Thomas Daamgaard
- ❑ Dana Rosenblatt
- ❑ Agapito Sanchez
- ❑ Burt Schenk

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MICHAEL GRANT:

DOWN TO EARTH AND REACHING FOR THE STARS

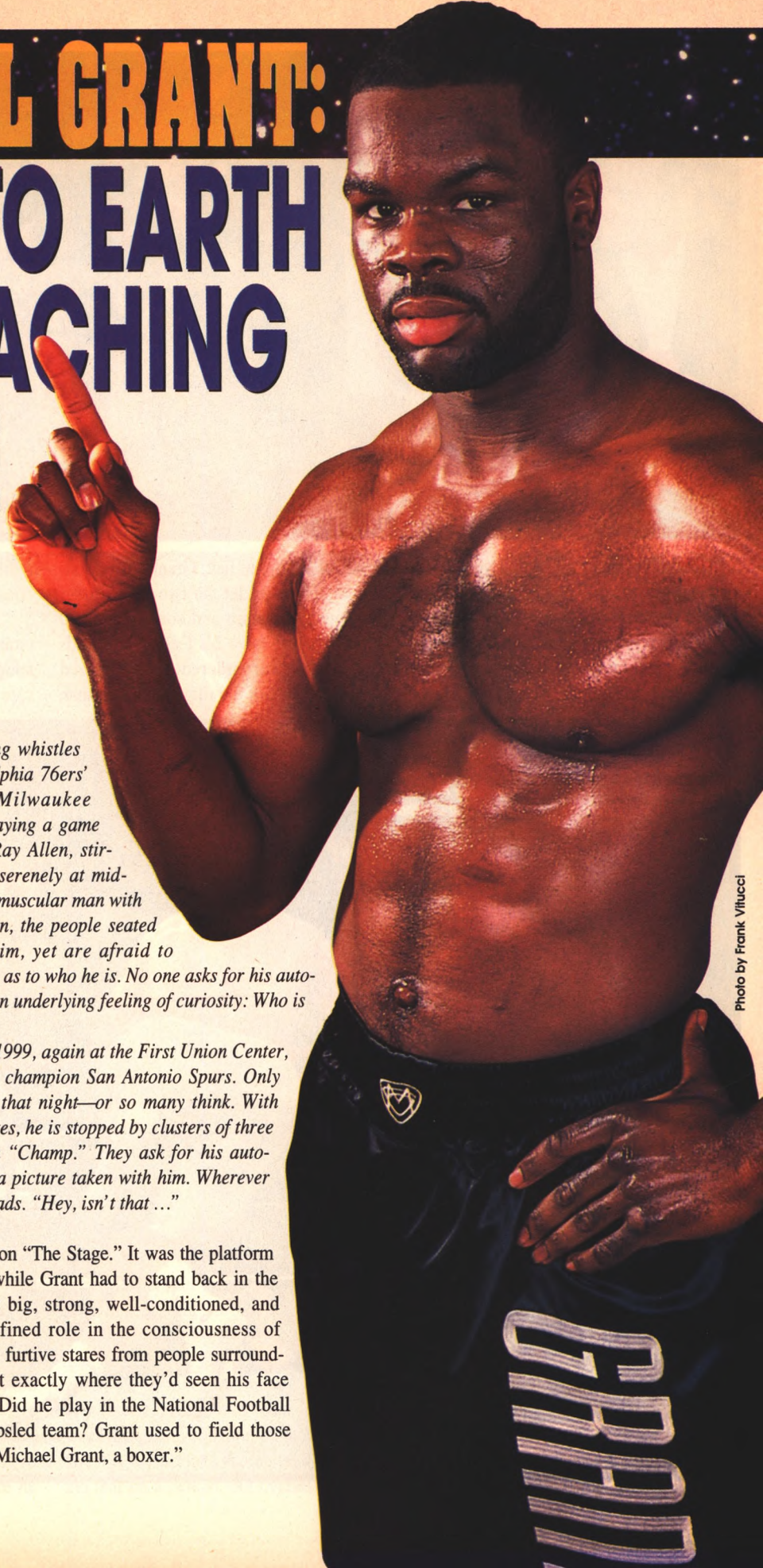


Photo by Frank Vitucci

By Joe Santoliquito

The scene: Focus in on chirping whistles and crowd noise at a Philadelphia 76ers' game in 1998 against the Milwaukee Bucks. The 76ers' Allen Iverson is playing a game of one-upsmanship with Bucks star Ray Allen, stirring the crowd into a frenzy. Sitting serenely at midcourt among all the hoopla is a large, muscular man with his young son on his lap. On occasion, the people seated nearby steal a darting glance at him, yet are afraid to approach him because they are unsure as to who he is. No one asks for his autograph, no one stops him. But there is an underlying feeling of curiosity: Who is this guy?

Cut to the present, late-November 1999, again at the First Union Center, where the 76ers are hosting the NBA champion San Antonio Spurs. Only there is another champ in the house that night—or so many think. With seemingly every step the large man takes, he is stopped by clusters of three or four newfound fans. They call him "Champ." They ask for his autograph. Some have cameras and want a picture taken with him. Wherever he goes, he leaves a trail of turning heads. "Hey, isn't that ..."

Michael Grant always had his eye on "The Stage." It was the platform where other star athletes performed, while Grant had to stand back in the wings and watch with envy. He was big, strong, well-conditioned, and growing impatient. He had an undefined role in the consciousness of American sports fans. He would draw furtive stares from people surrounding him who were unable to pinpoint exactly where they'd seen his face before. Was he a basketball player? Did he play in the National Football League? Was he on the Jamaican bobsled team? Grant used to field those questions frequently, then reply, "I'm Michael Grant, a boxer."

"Michael who?"

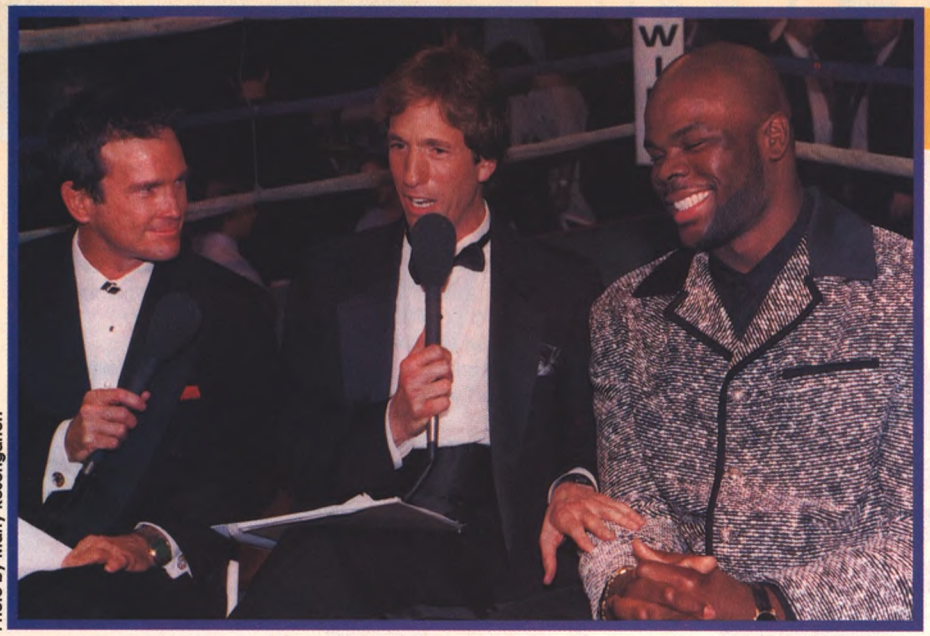


Photo by Marty Rosengarten

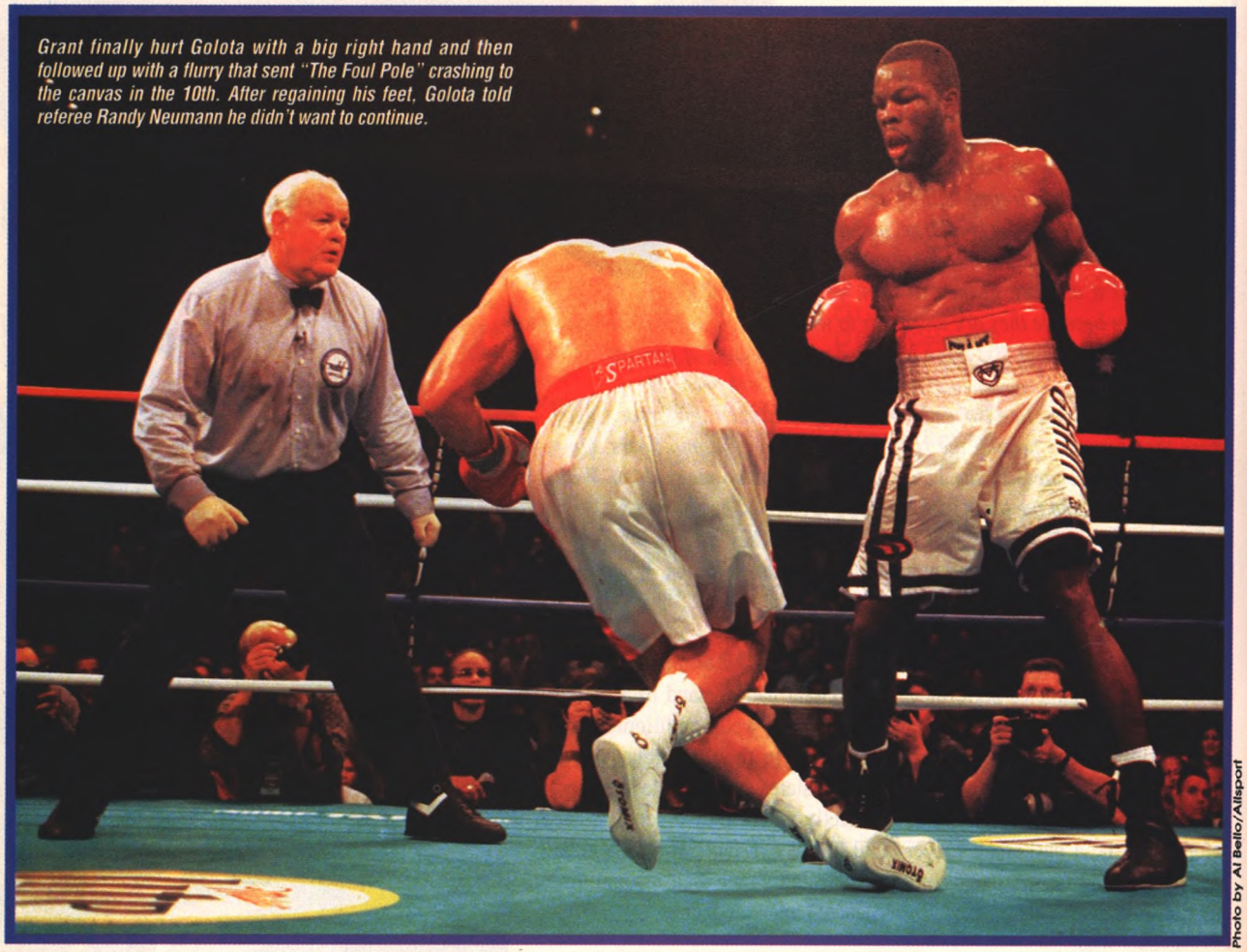
Grant's affable qualities frequently come out when he talks with fans or the media. Here, Grant shares a laugh with the old **Tuesday Night Fights** *crew of Sean O'Grady and Al Albert.*

George Foreman asked that very question before the 6'7", 250-pound Grant proved that he belongs in the pantheon of today's heavyweight stars with his dramatic 10th-round knockout of Andrew Golota on November 20 at the Trump Taj Mahal in Atlantic City. In fact, Grant felt personally compelled to let the two-time former heavyweight champ and sometime HBO boxing analyst know his feelings. Seconds after Golota surrendered, Grant rushed over to the side of the ring where Foreman was sitting with the rest of the HBO broadcast crew, straddled the ropes, and shouted down at Big George.

"Now do you know who I am?" yelled Grant.

In a year's time, Grant, 31-0 (22), has transformed himself from a "who" to a more recognizable "isn't that ... " in the eyes of the general sports fan. The Golota victory seemed to galvanize Grant's rising star power. His career has been buoyed—some jealous of him may say carried—by cable giant HBO, but now it seems to be taking a different turn. Grant is entering the rarefied realm of superstardom.

"It's something I've always wanted," Grant admitted. "I see these other guys I know who play pro sports, and I try to elevate myself to where they are. I saw Ray



Grant finally hurt Golota with a big right hand and then followed up with a flurry that sent "The Foul Pole" crashing to the canvas in the 10th. After regaining his feet, Golota told referee Randy Neumann he didn't want to continue.

Photo by Al Bello/Allsport

Allen that night. Sure, it would be nice to be in that position. I see guys like him and [New York Jets receiver] Keyshawn [Johnson]. They made it; why can't I? I'm a clean liver, I work hard. I knew my time would come. It was just a matter of opportunity. I know I could fit that position [of superstar] pretty well and carry myself well with it. The public can adjust to me, and I know I can adjust to the public and appreciate the attention they give me."

Grant, however, is a refreshing contrast to today's pampered sports superstar. They are often depicted as pretentious, self-absorbed, spoiled celebrities—and rightfully so. They radiate the feeling that it should be *your* privilege to be in *their* company. Grant is different. He parks his ego at the door before he enters a crowded room.

Photo by Marty Rosengarten

Before meeting Golota, Grant had a lot to account for in the eyes of fight fans after subpar outings against former sparring partner Ahmad Abdin (above) and Lou Savarese (left).

When THE RING asked Grant to come to its editorial offices for a photo shoot in December, he arrived alone, minus the entourage that clings to most fighters of his stature. There was no chauffeured limo waiting for him in the parking lot. He drove himself. Money makes people funny, but it's important to Grant to remain the same person he was before he became "Michael Grant, Heir Apparent To The Heavyweight Throne." He is basically unfazed by it all—the burgeoning attention, his climbing income.

"A lot of times the money can change you," said Grant, who now commands seven figures every time he steps into the ring. "A lot of times the attention can wear and tear on a person, but overall, the main idea is to stay cool and stay humble. I need to remain myself. If the attention gets too hectic, I know when to get away, because I know the attention is always going to be there when I come back.

"This is a great time for me. I'm in a great position. Exposure-wise, there's definitely been a difference in my life over the last year. But it's nothing to get too excited about. Nothing can change my demeanor as to who I am. That's the ideal, of keeping to who I am. I have to admit, there are some things you can get tired of, who you have to be careful of, and you have to know who's who. Don't get me wrong, the attention has been good, but it's also made me more careful. There could be people with ulterior motives. I hate to be that way, but I'm more careful of attention now than I used to be."

It hasn't been just Grant's beaming smile and effervescent personality that have transformed him into a boxing celebrity. His performances in the ring have played the most important role in his recent ascent, with no fight bigger than the Golota bout.

What sells best is winning. Grant was doing that, but boxing has a tendency to ask its participants for a little more. Grant was not providing that *umph!* the boxing public demanded. There were questions concerning whether or not his heart really

(Continued on page 74)

The Ring's Fighter Of The Year

PAULIE AYALA

"From Ali To Marciano To Tunney, I'm In Very Good Company"

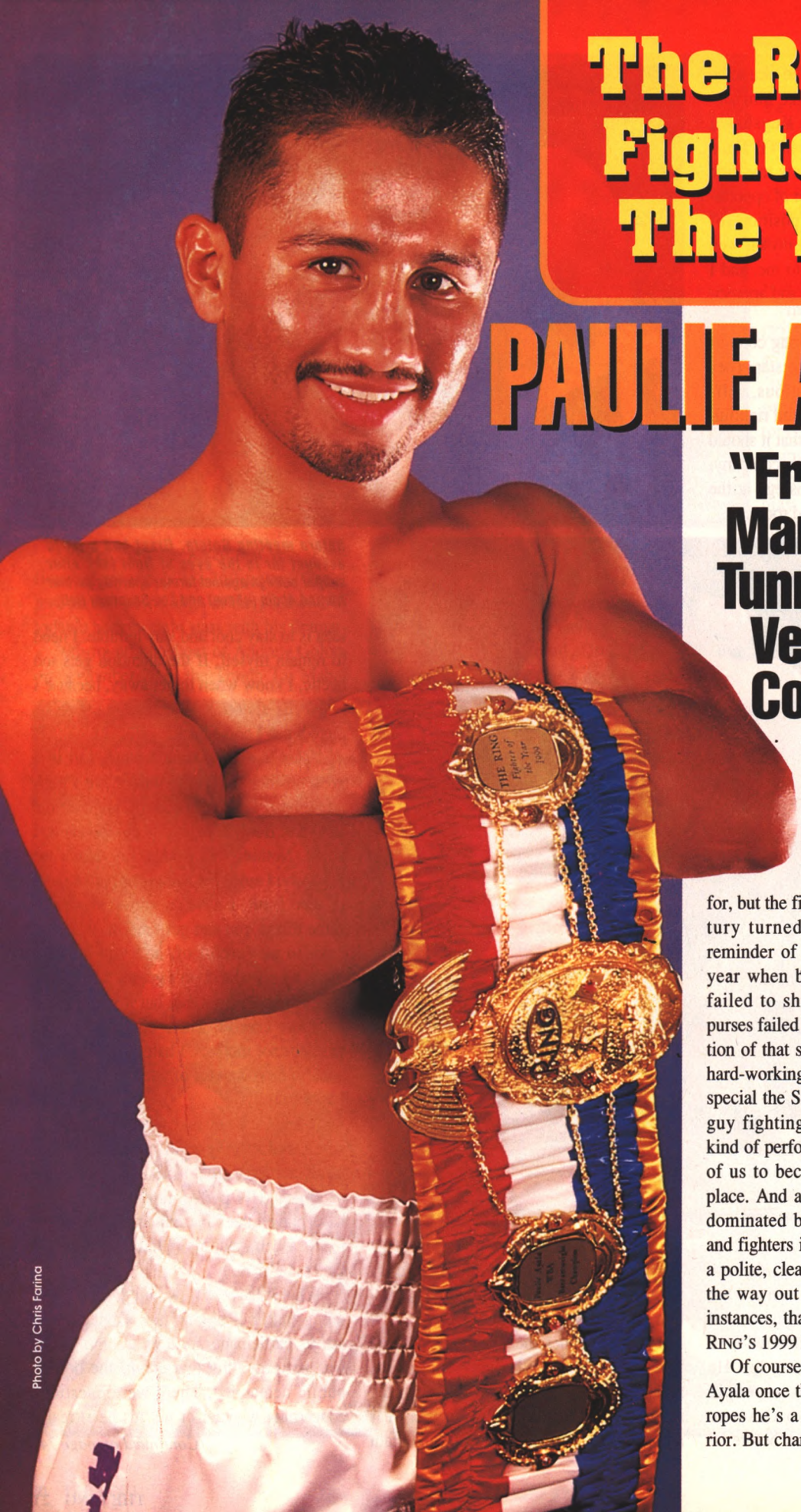


Photo by Chris Farina

By Nigel Collins

It wasn't what we expected, and it certainly wasn't what we'd hoped for, but the final 12 months of the 20th century turned out to be a much-needed reminder of what's really important. In a year when boxing's so-called superstars failed to shine and multimillion-dollar purses failed to produce fights worth a fraction of that sum, it took one of the game's hard-working grunts to remind us just how special the Sweet Science can be. It took a guy fighting for $60,000 to provide the kind of performance that had inspired most of us to become boxing fans in the first place. And at a time when headlines were dominated by scandals, bogus decisions, and fighters in trouble with the law, it took a polite, clean-cut, family man to show us the way out of the darkness. In all three instances, that man was Paulie Ayala, THE RING's 1999 Fighter of the Year.

Of course, being a nice guy doesn't help Ayala once the bell rings, and between the ropes he's a fierce, uncompromising warrior. But character is the most fundamental

part of a fighter's makeup, the foundation upon which everything else is built. A fighter with strength of character carries an extra weapon into the ring with him, a weapon that can often mean the difference between victory and defeat.

Ayala's story would be corny if it wasn't true. At the beginning of the year, he was considered little more than a good fighter who had been unlucky when his first title bid ended in a technical loss. His opponent, then-WBC bantamweight champion Joichiro Tatsuyoshi, had been cut by an accidental clash of heads, and the 1998 bout in Yokohama, Japan, was terminated after six rounds with Tatsuyoshi slightly ahead. As Ayala was promoted by Top Rank, we knew he would eventually get another shot, but when that shot came against undefeated legend Johnny Tapia, most figured Ayala would come up short again.

Despite his reputation as a nice guy outside of the ring, Ayala is a passionate warrior once the opening bell sounds. Check out the intense look on his face as he takes the action to Johnny Tapia in THE RING'S *1999 Fight of the Year.*

Photo by Tom Casino/Showtime

But not only did Ayala upset the odds and beat Tapia by unanimous decision to win the WBA 118-pound title, their 12-rounder turned out to be the Fight of the Year, a spellbinding, see-saw thriller in which both combatants covered themselves in glory *(see sidebar on page 24)*. His triumph over Tapia, in and of itself, may have been enough to earn Ayala the year's top honors. But rather than take the customary gimme in his first defense, Ayala tackled the WBA's number-one

THE RING'S FIGHTERS OF THE YEAR

1928:	Gene Tunney	1952:	Rocky Marciano	1976:	George Foreman
1929:	Tommy Loughran	1953:	Bobo Olson	1977:	Carlos Zarate
1930:	Max Schmeling	1954:	Rocky Marciano	1978:	Muhammad Ali
1931:	Tommy Loughran	1955:	Rocky Marciano	1979:	Ray Leonard
1932:	Jack Sharkey	1956:	Floyd Patterson	1980:	Thomas Hearns
1933:	No Award	1957:	Carmen Basilio	1981:	Ray Leonard/Salvador Sanchez
1934:	Tony Canzoneri/Barney Ross	1958:	Ingemar Johansson	1982:	Larry Holmes
1935:	Barney Ross	1959:	Ingemar Johansson	1983:	Marvin Hagler
1936:	Joe Louis	1960:	Floyd Patterson	1984:	Thomas Hearns
1937:	Henry Armstrong	1961:	Joe Brown	1985:	Marvin Hagler/Donald Curry
1938:	Joe Louis	1962:	Dick Tiger	1986:	Mike Tyson
1939:	Joe Louis	1963:	Cassius Clay	1987:	Evander Holyfield
1940:	Billy Conn	1964:	Emile Griffith	1988:	Mike Tyson
1941:	Joe Louis	1965:	Dick Tiger	1989:	Pernell Whitaker
1942:	Ray Robinson	1966:	No Award	1990:	Julio Cesar Chavez
1943:	Fred Apostoli	1967:	Joe Frazier	1991:	James Toney
1944:	Beau Jack	1968:	Nino Benvenuti	1992:	Riddick Bowe
1945:	Willie Pep	1969:	Jose Napoles	1993:	Michael Carbajal
1946:	Tony Zale	1970:	Joe Frazier	1994:	Roy Jones
1947:	Gus Lesnevich	1971:	Joe Frazier	1995:	Oscar De La Hoya
1948:	Ike Williams	1972:	Muhammad Ali/Carlos Monzon	1996:	Evander Holyfield
1949:	Ezzard Charles	1973:	George Foreman	1997:	Evander Holyfield
1950:	Ezzard Charles	1974:	Muhammad Ali	1998:	Floyd Mayweather
1951:	Ray Robinson	1975:	Muhammad Ali	1999:	Paulie Ayala

contender, Sahoiu Sithchai Condo, a hard-punching Thai whom Tapia had been sidestepping throughout his reign. It, too, turned out to be a riveting, give-and-take punchout in which Ayala again emerged victorious via unanimous decision, cementing his claim as '99's premier pugilist. Ayala's reaction upon learning of his selection was typical of his unassuming nature.

"I was very, very surprised," he said. "Even being nominated was an honor for me. Getting the belt was really overwhelming. To see my name on the list of the champions who have won is amazing. I think the boxing historians will appreciate it a lot more because of the people who have won prior to me. From Ali to Rocky Marciano to Gene Tunney, I'm in very good company. I think it's the highest award I could possibly win in boxing."

"It makes you feel good when something like this happens," said Top Rank's Bob Arum, not normally the warm and fuzzy sort. "He's such a nice man."

A good illustration of the sort of person Ayala is came shortly after he beat Tapia. Upon his return home, the good people of Fort Worth, Texas, decided that their latest boxing hero deserved a parade in his

PAULIE AYALA: THE YEAR THAT WAS

When Henry Armstrong won THE RING's Fighter of the Year award in 1937, he fought 17 times! Sugar Ray Robinson had 14 bouts in '42, the first time he won the magazine's highest honor, and 14 when he won it again in '51. Things are vastly different these days, and a world-class fighter who has six fights a year is considered busy. This year's winner fought only three times, but if there's a fighter around who can pack almost as much action into three bouts as the old-timers used to do in a dozen or more, it was Paulie Ayala in 1999.

Tapia and Ayala slug it out

Photo by Chris Farina

W 10 David Vazquez, Fort Worth, Texas, February 20, 1999: Ayala was still smarting from the disappointment he'd suffered losing a technical decision to Joichiro Tatsuyoshi in a WBC title fight the previous August. He'd already begun the rebuilding process with an easy fourth-round stoppage of Ivan Salazar in November, but had to keep winning if he expected to get another title crack.

"I knew he was a tough, young fighter out of California," recalled Ayala. "I was expecting to go the distance because I'd seem him fight a couple of times."

Ayala was right. Despite an ordinary 13-5-2 (8) record, Vazquez made the future champion work for his money before dropping a one-sided decision by scores of 100-93, 98-93, and 97-93. It didn't look like it would go the distance when Ayala's right hook to the body hurt Vazquez in the opening round, but he sucked it up and jabbed his way back into the fight, and also landed some hurtful-looking body blows of his own.

Ayala had Vazquez in trouble several times, bloodying his nose and raking him with sharp combinations. But Vazquez hung tough, and seemed to get stronger as the fight progressed. He jabbed and countered with some success the last three rounds, but could never quite match Ayala's hand speed and volume. In the closing moments of the 10th, they stood toe-to-toe, trading punches at a furious rate as the fans whooped it up.

It was, on balance, a typical Ayala fight, a crowd-pleasing scrap in which he probably took more punches than was absolutely necessary, but still dominated his man while giving the paying customers a reason to come back the next time. Nobody at the time realized it would serve as the perfect tuneup for what turned out to be Ayala's career-defining fight.

W 12 Johnny Tapia, Las Vegas, Nevada, June 26, 1999: This was Tapia's second fight back with Top Rank after a stint with Don King. Even though he'd won his second world title

honor, and Ayala was delighted by the prospect. He'd been part of a boxing parade before, but he was only 16 then, and certainly not the star attraction.

"The thing that was so neat about my parade was that back when Stevie Cruz won his title by beating Barry McGuigan in 1986, I had won the Junior Olympic Nationals, and had the opportunity to ride in his parade," said Ayala. "So I requested that all the local amateur boxing teams participate in my parade. Hopefully, one of them will be a future champion."

The immediate future as far as the 29-year-old Ayala is concerned will take him back to the site of his victory over Tapia, back to the Mandalay Bay Events Center in Las Vegas. He'll be defending the WBA belt there on March 4 against Denmark's Johnny Bredahl on a pay-per-view card that will also feature WBA 122-pound champion Nestor Garza defending against two-division former champion Danny Romero. For Ayala, it will be the start of a campaign that Arum hopes will lead to future appearances on Showtime and/or HBO.

"We want to get him on one of those at least two times in 2000," said Arum. "Paulie's much bigger in terms of prestige

fighting for King, Tapia was starting to lose some of his luster, thanks mainly to King's uninspired matchmaking that pitted the charismatic Tapia against a series of no-names. But this was different; Ayala was a live underdog, somebody serious fans knew and cared about. Still, Tapia was unbeaten in 48 pro fights, a rawhide tough, highly skilled veteran, equally at home boxing at long range or mixing it up on the inside. Ayala figured to give him a good fight, but that was about it—until the opening bell rang, that is.

Actually, the action started prior to the first round. Angered by the fact that some of his cronies had been ejected from his dressing room by Vegas cops, Tapia's emotions were boiling over by the time he ducked between the ropes. He rushed over to where Ayala was standing and gave him a shove. If Tapia expected his challenger to be intimidated, he was wrong. Ayala couldn't have been more pleased. He knew his best bet was to lure Tapia into a slugfest, and an angry Tapia was much more likely to oblige.

And that's exactly what happened. Tapia abandoned the hit-and-run tactics he had been using since outboxing arch-rival Danny Romero the previous summer, and met Ayala head-on, eager to inflict damage. Ayala happily rose to the challenge, and the war was on. What took place the next 12 rounds looked like one long highlight film, as first one, and then the other took turns punishing his adversary with a seemingly endless series of punches.

But it wasn't a crude slugging match. Both men displayed polished moves and unleashed their punches in clusters of compact combinations. Many of the rounds were extremely close, but Ayala's quicker hands gave him an edge in the majority of the exchanges, and at the halfway point, an upset seemed likely. Tapia closed the gap down the stretch, but an inspired rally by Ayala in the 12th was enough to sway the judges in his favor, and he took the verdict by tallies of 115-114 and 116-113 (twice).

When asked what memory stood out the most from a brawl that was eventually selected as THE RING's Fight of the Year, Ayala smiled and said, "When the announcer said, 'the winner and *new* WBA bantamweight champion ... '"

W 12 Sahoiu Sithchai Condo, Fort Worth, Texas, October 23, 1999: Ayala inherited the mandatory defense against Condo from Tapia, and after it was over, he joked that he now understood why Tapia had been ducking the hard-hitting invader from Thailand. Though virtually unknown in the United States, Condo proved to be a very worthy challenger.

"He was number one for a reason," said Ayala, "and I found out what that reason was."

Indeed he did. Condo came out fast, firing heavy right hands at Ayala's head. The defending champion answered with fast flurries, and there was a bristling exchange to end the second. Ayala almost ended matters early when he rocked Condo into the ropes with a left-right in the fourth, but was slow to follow up, and the moment passed.

Condo, a deceptive 17-6 (12), never stopped winging his right, but thanks to his sharper, more accurate combinations, Ayala gradually pulled ahead. Condo took quite a pounding down the stretch, but remained dangerous right up until the final bell.

"I knew he was going for the knockout, so I had to sharpen up my defense," said Ayala. "That right hand of his was landing a lot the first few rounds, but after I figured out his style, I wanted him to throw the right in order to counter it."

The crowd at the Will Rogers Coliseum stood and applauded at the start of the last round, and although Condo was still desperately trying to land a miracle punch, Ayala coasted home to take the decision by scores of 117-111 and 118-110 (twice).

"I think anyone who fought this guy would have trouble," said Ayala afterward, the left side of his face swollen from the effects of Condo's rights. "But I proved I'm a force to be reckoned with, a champion to be reckoned with. I've always said from the beginning, I just needed an opportunity. Now that I have it, I'm going to make the best of it."

—NC

Condo was no joke

Photo by R & J Studio Productions

now than he was prior to the Tapia fight. Paulie is close to becoming a superstar, and now there's enough interest in him that there's no need to go to Thailand and places like that."

The hope here is that if and when Ayala achieves the superstar status of which Arum spoke, he won't suddenly turn into a reluctant dragon and begin turning in tepid performances like Oscar De La Hoya and Felix Trinidad did in the so-called "Fight Of The Millennium." Or, for that matter, like Evander Holyfield and Lennox Lewis did in their pair of overpriced but underwhelming heavyweight unification bouts. Ayala is hesitant to criticize other boxers, but promises that success won't change the way he goes about things inside of the ring.

"For me, it's always been strictly business," Ayala said. "I had high expectations for De La Hoya and Trinidad and for Lewis and Holyfield, and they didn't meet my expectations. Not that I'm biased, but as a boxing fan, I see my fights as being entertaining. From round one to round 12, even though I'd like to get knockouts, they're action-packed."

It's not often that singles hitters like Ayala, who has only 12 quick endings on his 29-1 record, create the kind of home-run excitement that has typified his fights. But ironically enough, the fact that he doesn't have a big punch is part of the reason he's so much fun to watch. Even though Ayala is a highly skilled technician and would probably be reasonably successful playing it safe and pecking his way to wins, his pride and macho Mexican heritage won't allow him to take the cautious route. Even though he has stopped less than half of his victims, Ayala fights with the intensity of an assassin. And thanks to his quick hands, rapid-fire combinations, and savvy inside moves, he can go into the trenches with harder hitters and emerge victorious.

One hard hitter Ayala is anxious to cross gloves with in 2000 is his IBF counterpart, Tim Austin.

"I'd love to compete against Tim," said Ayala. "I've seen him fight, but I don't think he's fought the same sort of competition as me, other than [Mbulelo] Botile [from whom Austin won the title with a come-from-behind knockout]. And I think Botile was having trouble making weight, and that's why he fizzled out at the end."

Photo by Chris Farina

Ayala has his hands full lifting his wife, Leti, who has a firm grip on her husband's WBA belt. Together, they are raising their two children back home in Fort Worth, Texas, where the always entertaining Ayala is the city's latest boxing hero.

But while a unification match with Austin would be an outstanding attraction, the fight most boxing fans want to see is a rematch with Tapia. Their first fight was not only breathtakingly exciting, it was exceedingly close. Tapia, in the heat of the moment, blamed the loss on the fact that he was fighting the final fight of his promotional contract with Top Rank, while Ayala was still part of Arum's stable. And although Tapia's comments had a distinct sour-grapes flavor, there's no doubt that the loser deserves a rematch. As we went to press, Tapia was scheduled to meet Jorge Eliecer Julio on January 8 in his first start since losing to Ayala, and although Julio is a formidable opponent with a respectable chance of handing Tapia his second loss, Ayala is still optimistic about another encounter with his most famous rival.

"I think there's a big chance I fight Johnny again. That's why I'm pulling for him to beat Julio. That way there could be some sort of unification when we do meet," said Ayala in reference to the lightly regarded WBO belt that will be up for grabs in the Tapia-Julio match.

Even if Ayala and Tapia do hook up again in 2000, it will be difficult for Ayala to top the kind of year he had in '99—and he knows it. But despite all the success and all the honors that came his way, Ayala points to a non-fistic event as the highlight of the past year.

"My wife and I had a daughter in May, on Cinco de Mayo," he said. "So she was really the biggest thing that happened to me in '99."

Spoken like a man of character. ■

THE GREATEST FIGHT I EVER SAW

Boxing's Best Writers' Everlasting Memories

The best boxing writers are always boxing fans as well as journalists. It doesn't matter how great of a wordsmith somebody is, if he doesn't love the sport he's covering, he can't invest in it the sort of passion it takes to do the subject justice. This criterion was foremost when choosing the six writers who have contributed to this special section. The assignment was simple: Write an essay on the greatest fight you ever saw in person. But before we get to the meat of the section, a few words about the writers selected.

• *Michael Katz, of the New York* ***Daily News****, is one of the most influential journalists currently covering the sport. An outspoken crusader, he routinely goes toe-to-toe with the most powerful people in the industry. The Sweet Science is lucky to have him in its corner.*

• *Jeff Ryan is well-known to readers of* THE RING *and its sister magazine* ***KO****, thanks to the monthly columns he contributes to both publications. A highly creative and perceptive writer, Ryan has a well-earned reputation for wielding one of the most caustic wits in the business.*

• ***The Boston Globe's*** *Ron Borges is probably best known as the only journalist to pick Evander Holyfield to beat Mike Tyson the first time they fought. But it is Borges' astute investigative reporting and lyrical writing style that have made him a leader in the field.*

• *Bernard Fernandez' outstanding boxing coverage for the* ***Philadelphia Daily News****,* THE RING*, and its sister publications earned him the prestigious Nat Fleischer Award as 1998's Writer of the Year. The son of a former pro fighter, Fernandez is also a regular on* ***Daily News Live****, a sports talk show produced by Comcast, an all-sports cable network based in Philadelphia.*

• *Ivan Goldman,* THE RING*'s West Coast correspondent and a* ***KO*** *columnist, brings a novelist's sensibility to boxing writing. Between writing books, teaching, and editing, Goldman generates some of today's most literate and entertaining boxing copy.*

• *Johnnie Whitehead, an assistant sports editor with the* ***Orlando Sentinel****, is the only contributor who is literally in fighting shape. Besides his newspaper duties and frequent features for London Publishing's group of boxing magazines, Whitehead trains at the Wiseguys Gym in Orlando six days a week and usually spars on three of them.*

There you have it: six of the world's finest boxing writers writing about the best fight they ever saw. So grab the beverage of your choice, settle back into your favorite easy chair, and relive the pageantry, drama, and excitement of boxing at its very best.

THE GREATEST FIGHT I EVER SAW

LARRY HOLMES W 15 KEN NORTON

June 9, 1978

By Michael Katz

Obviously, I've seen too many punches, because the best fight I've ever covered is a blur now, a hazy montage of blood and guts, an altogether ennobling experience. It was a violent reassurance of the human spirit, watching two men take turns clobbering each other.

Punches went by too quickly to take notes. Ken Norton and Larry Holmes truly did not like each other at the time, and neither was about to suffer the indignity of being knocked down by the other. Pride preventeth the fall.

First, Holmes dominated. He was 28 then, still able to get up on his toes and dance like his old sparring partner, Muhammad Ali. He had a better jab. Where Ali flicked, Holmes punched.

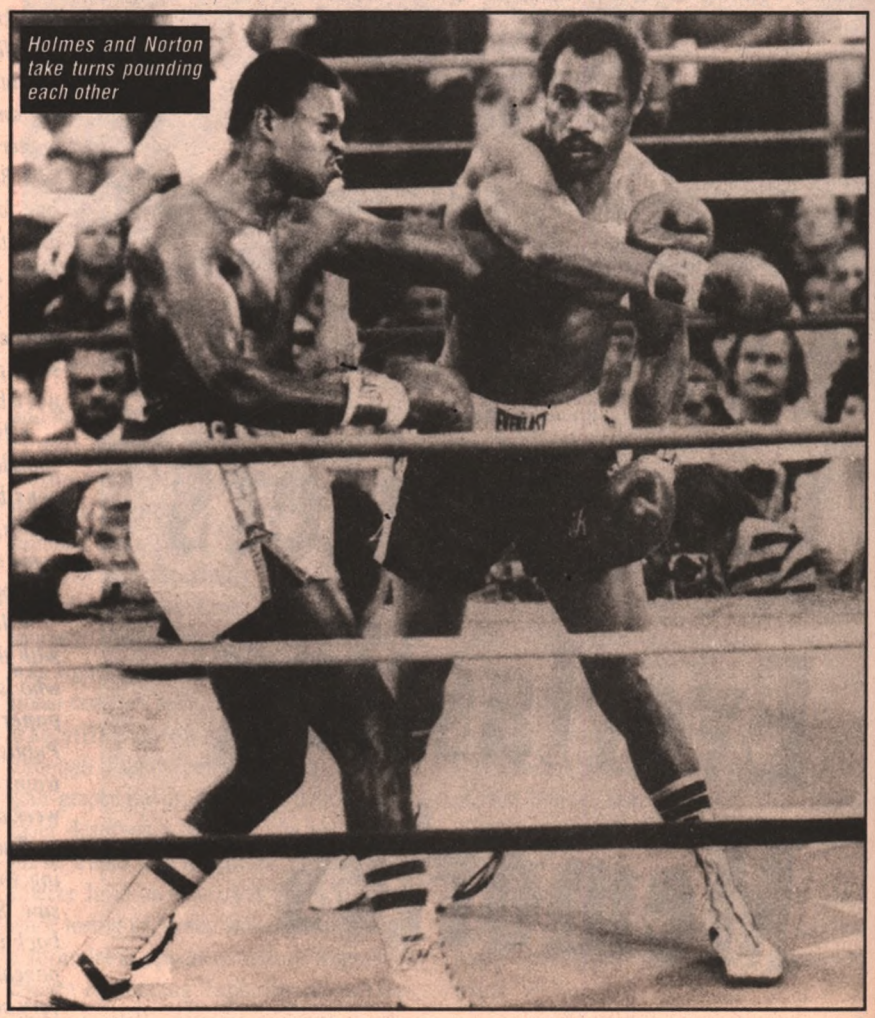
But Norton always had Ali's number, and so, stylistically, he was a match for the more talented Holmes. So Norton came back, and Holmes was in trouble. Then somehow, he survived and put Norton on the brink. Back and forth it went, and it was heart-stopping and heart-breaking, because both men couldn't win, and neither deserved to lose.

> "It was heart-stopping and heart-breaking, because both men couldn't win, and neither deserved to lose."

But my most vivid memory of the best heavyweight bout this side of Manila was the winner's trainer drunkenly eating a steak with his bare hands.

It was my first trip to Las Vegas, and it's been downhill for the 21-plus years since Norton and Holmes almost civilized Sodom in the Desert with a 15-round (ah, the good old days) display of guts and skill.

I was sheltered at Caesars Palace, then and probably now the world capital of those twin towers, opulence and decadence. I remember walking up the red-car-



Holmes and Norton take turns pounding each other

peted spiral staircase, its brass banisters lined with electric lights, to the most expensive restaurant in the hotel, the Palace Court. There, at the top, greeting me was the sign I shall always associate with Vegas.

It said, "TOILET."

I remember that first night, the late, great publicist Murray Goodman and I were dining well past my bedtime in the Cafe Roma, when Holmes' trainer, Richie Giachetti, swaggered in and sat down at our table.

A waiter appeared, Giachetti ordered a steak, put his head down on the table, and promptly fell asleep. Goodman continued to extol the virtues of working for Don King and what a great fighter young Holmes was, and isn't this great, being in Vegas, where you can still get herring in cream sauce with onions.

After a while, the waiter returned with the steak and asked should he wake Giachetti, who was snoring peacefully, face down on the table. Goodman, cigar clenched in the corner of his mouth just the way Damon Runyan envisioned, said sure, with a mischievous grin.

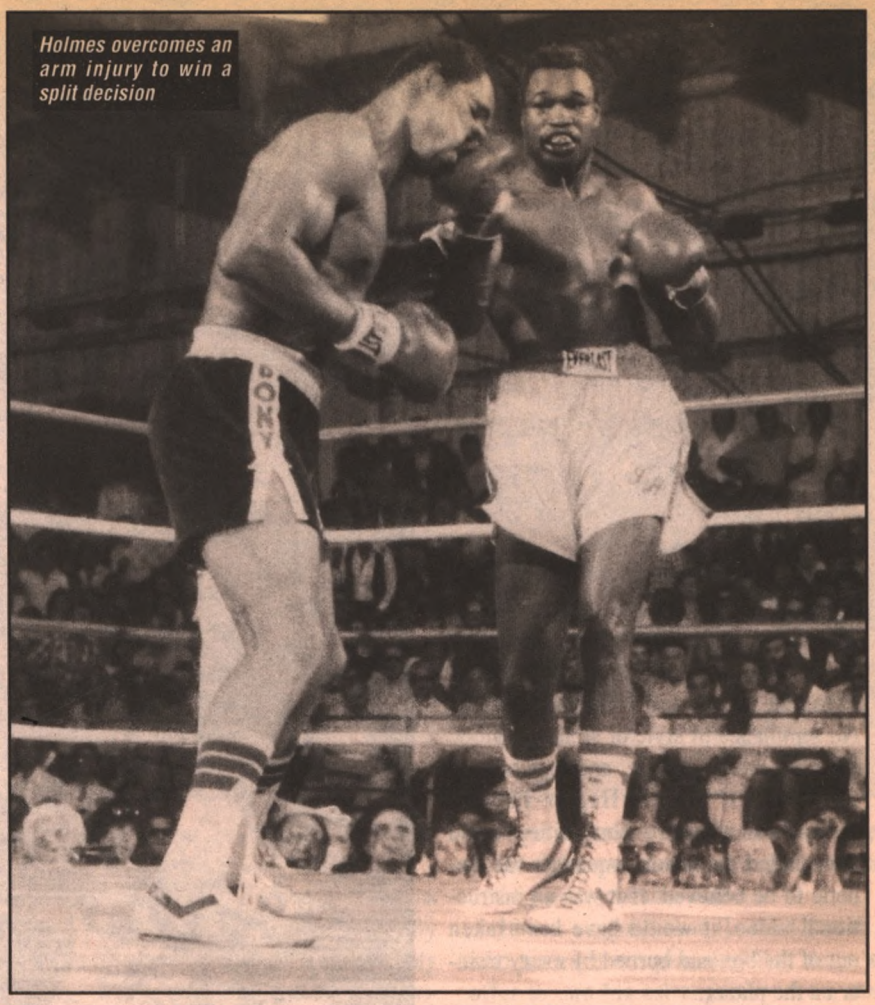
Giachetti opened his bloodshot eyes and picked up a knife and fork. He did not acknowledge either Murray or me. The steak was either tougher than Giachetti looks, or Giachetti was drunker than he looked. The knife and fork were useless in Giachetti's gnarled hands.

Those hands worked as a mechanic in Cleveland. He built cars and wanted someday to win the Daytona 500. Now those hands put down the knife and fork and picked up the steak. Still paying no attention to his tablemates, Giachetti tore into the steak with his teeth. I was not thinking this is better than Joe Louis-Billy Conn, the first.

Finally, except for a poor piece of gristle, Giachetti overcame his tough adversary. As soon as he finished eating, he pushed the plate to the center of the table and plopped his head, face down again, and returned to sleep.

Whatever sweet dreams Morpheus was serenading him with, Giachetti remained silent, except for the snore. Murray and I continued our conversation into the wee hours. Finally, the wily veteran suggested it was time to call it a night.

"What about Richie?" I asked.



Holmes overcomes an arm injury to win a split decision

Inquiring minds have to know.

"It's time for him, too," said Goodman, proceeding to wake the dread.

"I'm not going anywhere until I get my steak," Giachetti protested. "I ordered a steak and I'm going to eat a steak. What's taking it so long?"

He did not believe us when we told him it had been and gone.

"I would have remembered," he argued.

We pointed to the evidence, the piece of gristle that had been only inches from his snoring nose, and a couple of feet from the rest of his face, I'm tempted to add.

It was a bright moment in an otherwise tense week. Giachetti, even in a stupor, managed to keep secret that Holmes' left arm was seriously hurt in sparring six days before the fight. Larry was afraid Don King wouldn't give him a second shot, so he bravely went on.

Holmes, despite the injury to his biceps, used that magnificent jab to control the early rounds. It looked like it would be no contest, but Norton began cutting off the ring and landing more and more bodyshots. It was no longer a boxing match, but a fight.

I was lucky enough to cover other great fights—the first Ray Leonard-Thomas Hearns, the first Aaron Pryor-Alexis Arguello, all three between Evander Holyfield and Riddick Bowe. But nothing ever topped this for me.

Going into the 15th round, my scorecard read seven rounds each. That's how all three judges had it before the best round I've ever seen. They met in the middle of the ring, touched gloves now with respect, and then proceeded to take turns hammering on each other. First Holmes, then Norton, then Holmes ... I scored the last round for Norton. So did one of the judges. The other two scored it for Holmes. I think I would now, too.

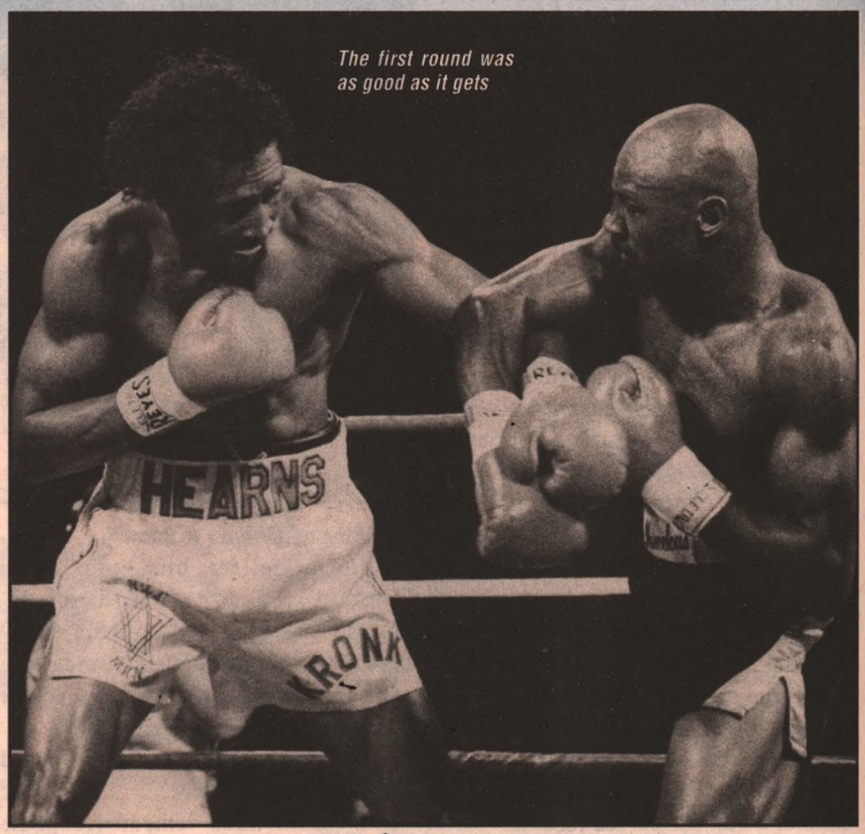
Holmes jumped into the pool instead of going to the postfight press conference. I was on deadline, and he was swimming. I forgive him, and his buddy. They gave us one of the most refreshing nights in sports history. ■

THE GREATEST FIGHT I EVER SAW

MARVIN HAGLER KO 3 THOMAS HEARNS

April 15, 1985

By Jeff Ryan



The first round was as good as it gets

For eight minutes and one second, all of boxing's violent stereotypes were laid right on the table. Two guys, who truly disliked each other, swinging for the kill with every punch. No semblance of style or strategy. Blood flowing, sweat pouring, and legs turning to rubber. If Marvin Hagler-Thomas Hearns was a feature film, critics would have called the action sequences too frenetic to be believed. If it was an instructional video, it would have been taken out of the box and burned by every trainer on the planet.

Tell me that there has been a greater fight in my lifetime, though, and be prepared for an earful in return. What the two middleweights delivered in a ring set up on the tennis courts of Caesars Palace one spring night in 1985 was a true rarity: a superfight that outdistanced its hype. (Which, in this case, included a 25-city drum-beating tour.) Chavez-Taylor I featured a more incredible finish. Gomez-Pintor sustained its action for 14 rounds. But Hagler-Hearns met *my* criteria for a great sports event and will always occupy a special place in my scrapbook and my soul.

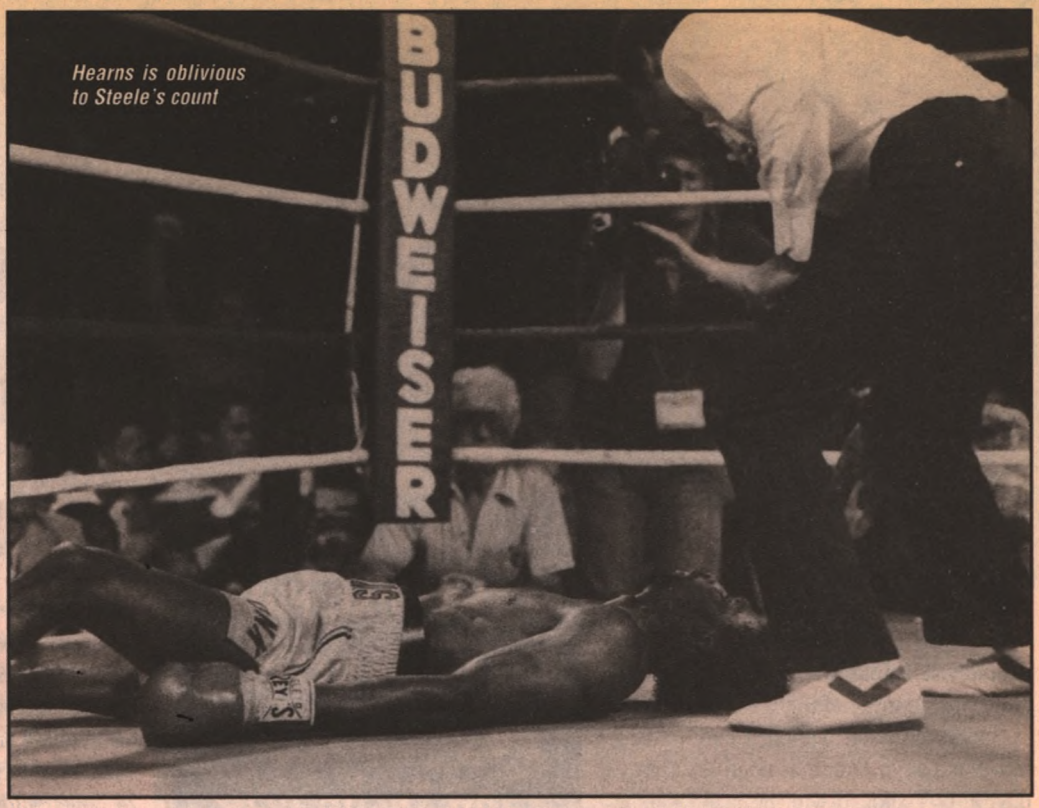
Many of us who follow the fight game find ourselves caught up in arguments with our wives, or sisters, or others who are quick to categorize the sport as nothing more than two guys trying to beat each other into a stupor. We try to tell them about Willie Pep and Pernell Whitaker, or about Muhammad Ali winning fights with just a jab. Then along comes Hagler-Hearns, and, suddenly, you don't care what anyone thinks. Yeah, it was an alley fight, like Foreman-Lyle and Zale-Graziano. It was primitive, not pretty. And what's so wrong with that? Nobody showed up at Caesars that night expecting a polo match.

> "Hagler-Hearns met *my* criteria for a great sports event and will always occupy a special place in my scrapbook and my soul."

This one was ugly, in fact, before it even started. Hearns declared that Hagler was shaking "like a leaf on a tree." Hagler vowed to "break every bone in his body." Superfight meets WrestleMania. Great stuff because the animosity was *real*.

What's so special to me about the way

Hagler-Hearns unfolded is that they were two highly skilled technicians who *chose* a streetfight, not limited brawlers who knew no other way. In dominating the middleweight ranks, Hagler had relied on his boxing ability as much as his brawn. Hearns, meanwhile, had outboxed Sugar Ray Leonard for much of their '81 bout and had outslicked Wilfred Benitez, one of the great stylists of all-time. In going after each other with such a fury, it was as though Hagler and Hearns were ignoring the bunt sign and swinging for the fences with the winning run on second and no outs in the bottom of the ninth. Ill-advised, sure, but a lot more fun to watch.



Hearns is oblivious to Steele's count

Rulebreakers have always been favorites of mine. Not the guys who bite ears during clinches or doctor baseballs with sandpaper. I'm talking about those athletes who disdain convention. Kordell Stewart and Doug Flutie, who ignore the maxim that quarterbacks shouldn't run in the NFL. Andre Agassi, who wins grass court tournaments from the baseline. And Hagler and Hearns, who fought with anger and emotion, brought punches up from the floor, led with uppercuts, neglected to pace themselves, tuned out their corner's instructions, and offered no apologies for any of it.

Hagler-Hearns appealed to whatever it is in me that has thirsted for offense ever since my father first took me to Yankee Stadium and Howard Cosell's voice first brought me to ringside. *You* wax poetic over 2-1 pitchers' duels, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' prevent defense, and World Cup soccer games that don't feature so much as a shot on goal for 10 minutes at a time. My idea of great sports viewing is one of those AFL games that ended 45-44 and featured more bombs than Chevy Chase's movie career. An American League game that ends 12-11 on a grand slam in the last inning is my idea of the national pastime. Those NBA ads that say "I love this game" weren't written by me. Give me the era when every team, even the bad ones, scored 100 points every night. *That's* entertainment.

Within the opening seconds, a Hearns left hook and right cross, followed by another right cross, hurt Hagler probably worse than he'd been stunned in 64 previous fights. Soon afterward, his forehead was cut. Hearns ended the first round by staggering to his corner. You want to know how good the fight was? Never before or since—not when Leonard was upsetting Marvelous Marvin, "Hit Man" was crushing Roberto Duran with a right hand felt all the way to Reno, Chavez and Taylor were waging a classic, or Mike Tyson's fists were conducting nuclear tests in the Nevada desert—have I heard the kind of roar from the celebrity-laden, apathetic Las Vegas crowd that erupted at the end of round one. The 15,088 in attendance had just seen a whole fight worth of action in three minutes—and there was still another five minutes of fireworks to come.

Hagler-Hearns was so good that even many of those observers who say it wasn't the greatest fight they've ever seen will tell you that round one was the best three minutes ever fought. It was so good that although Lois Hearns, Thomas' mom, was so overcome with grief at ringside that she needed three people to help her to a seat after her son was knocked out, she dried her eyes and stood transfixed as a replay of the fight was shown on a giant screen in the press room afterward.

It was so good that Howard Cosell, who turned down promoter Bob Arum's offer to end his estrangement from the fight game and call the fight for the closed-circuit broadcast, was probably kicking himself afterward. (Cosell's reaction to the battle probably would have made "Down goes Frazier!" sound like Jim Nantz whispering on the 18th green during The Masters.) And it was so good that neither fighter was ever the same again. Hagler's next two outings were a struggle with John Mugabi and the defeat to Leonard. Though Hearns had much greater success, he never again displayed the same sharp reflexes, and his ability to take a punch was diminished.

Hagler vs. Hearns on the tennis courts. The Roman Colosseum never featured a battle so intense. "The House That Ruth Built" never played host to prouder champions. Lambeau Field never served as the backdrop for such career-defining performances.

I'm sure I'll see a better fight someday, but it might not be until I'm sitting in that big makeshift stadium in the sky, watching the Joe Louis-Sugar Ray Robinson rubber match. ■

THE GREATEST FIGHT I EVER SAW

BUSTER DOUGLAS KO 10 MIKE TYSON

February 11, 1990

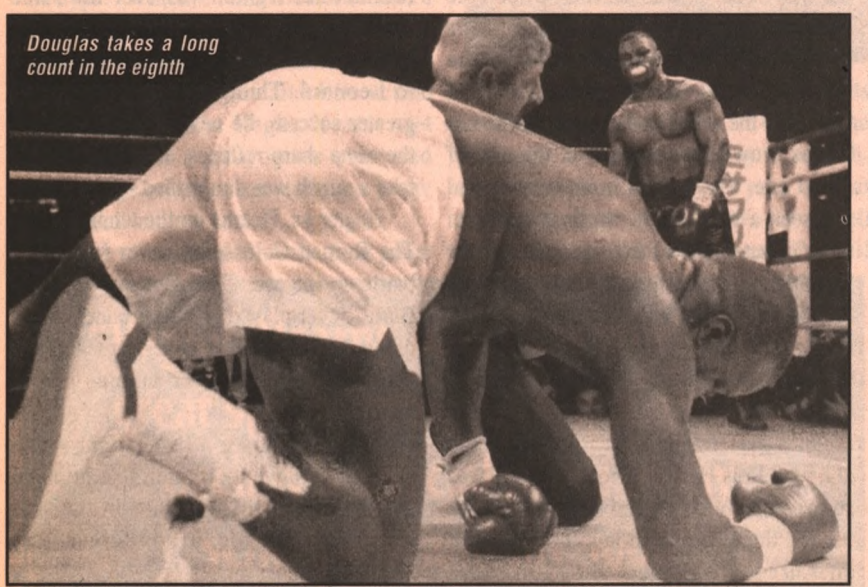
By Ron Borges

The Tokyo Dome was struck silent. Godzilla was in the ring, but he wasn't eating the people. One of the people was eating him, and no one knew quite what to make of it.

James "Buster" Douglas had walked into the Tokyo Dome at noon on a gray day, a 42-1 shot to win the heavyweight title from undefeated Mike Tyson. Tyson had won 37 straight fights on his way to becoming the youngest heavyweight champion in history, and of those, 33 had ended in knockouts, including seven of his nine title fights. He was a concussion machine, and that is what the people expected to see, so when Douglas came into the ring swathed in white, he looked like someone heading to the electric chair in ski underwear.

So lopsided was this affair expected to be that only six American journalists had traveled halfway around the world to witness it. As Douglas lifted his hand over his head to acknowledge the crowd, I turned to longtime Associated Press boxing writer Ed Schuyler and said, "That's as good as he's going to feel for a month." An hour later, Buster Douglas was heavyweight champion. Then the real fighting began.

> "In a polite society like Japan, royalty is never to be embarrassed, and Tyson was fistic royalty to everyone but the guy mugging him."



Douglas takes a long count in the eighth

Not long after they rang the first bell, Douglas forgot about his heavy heart and all his troubles, and began to take them out on Tyson. He forgot how his mother had died 24 hours before he was to leave for Japan and how his wife had left him weeks earlier because he would not give up this foolish idea of fighting Tyson. He forgot how the mother of his child had just learned she was dying of leukemia and how his father, a former tough middleweight named Billy "Dynamite" Douglas, was no longer speaking to him after he ran out of gas in his first shot at the heavyweight title against Tony Tucker and quit.

In the forgetting, Douglas also forgot who Tyson was. On this day, Douglas remembered only that he was a fighter with gifts. With nothing else to lose, he fought to win. Fought with all the speed, size, and power that God had blessed him with, but he had so seldom used. And when he did, he was dazzling.

"When that bell rings, James Douglas is going to go out with the intention of putting Mike Tyson on the floor," promised eccentric John Johnson, Douglas' manager. "Remember when Tyson fought Tucker? When he couldn't take him out, he started whining in the corner to his trainer, 'He's holding me. He's holding me.' Mike Tyson is a bully, but when somebody hits him, he freezes. When you hit him, he stops coming. James will hit him two or three in a row. Then we'll see about Mr. Mike Tyson."

Johnson sounded like a loyal but raving

maniac until Douglas did hit Tyson two or three in a row, and we saw about Mr. Mike Tyson. We saw he was like the rest of us. We saw him bleed. We saw his eyes swell. We saw him lose heart. We saw him grow frustrated, confused, and finally acquiescent to Douglas' stronger will and faster hands, as the challenger repeatedly slammed his jab in Tyson's face to stop him in his tracks.

Douglas was dismantling the myth of Mike Tyson, and no one knew what to say—so they said nothing. Had this been America, the crowd noise would have been deafening, but in a polite society like Japan, royalty is never to be embarrassed, and Tyson was fistic royalty to everyone but the guy mugging him.

In time, Tyson was out of ideas, and his amateurish cornermen could offer him no assistance except to press a balloon full of ice water against his fast closing left eye. The balloon was as ineffective in holding back the swelling as Tyson was in holding back the rising tide of Douglas' punches—until he suddenly lashed out with a wild right uppercut with four seconds left in the eighth round and sent Douglas to the floor.

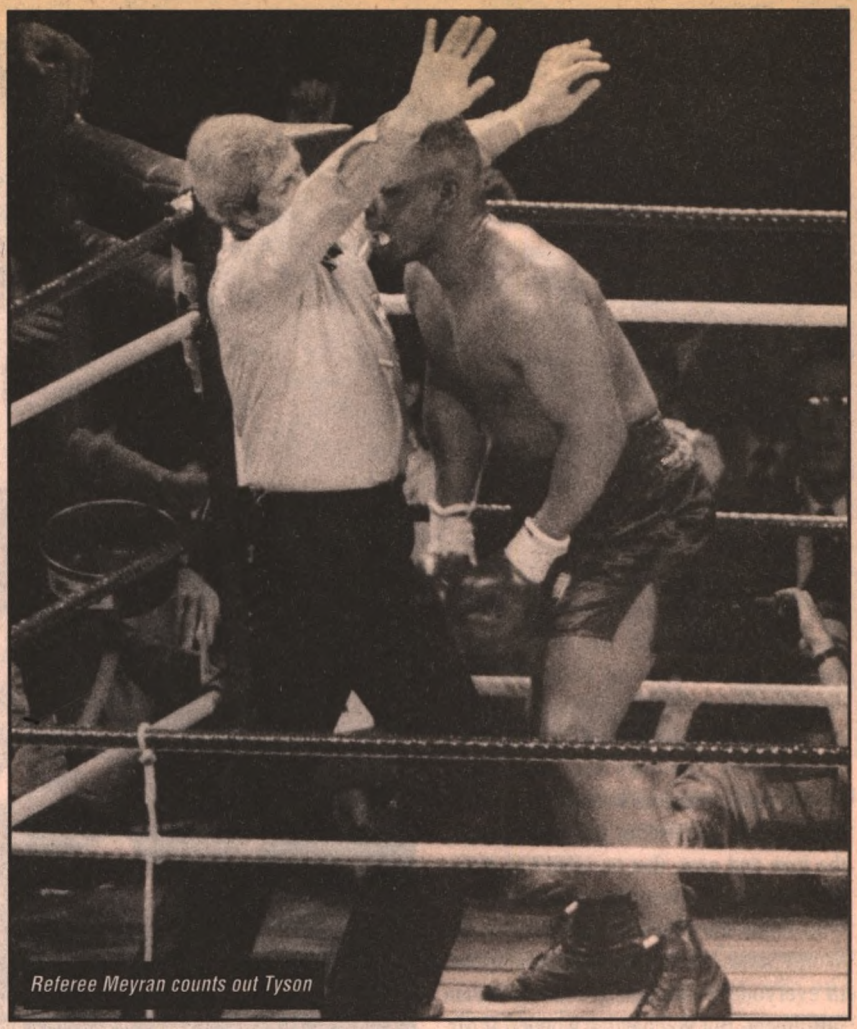
The instant after he fell, Douglas punched the canvas in disgust, his head clear and his anger rising. When he got up, he went to his corner, and when he came back out, nothing changed. He began beating on Tyson again.

But Buster's second act didn't last long. Tyson reached his breaking point midway through the 10th round, after a four-punch combination jolted him. He flew backward and fell on his back, his mouthpiece erupting from his lips like lava from a volcano.

As referee Oscar Meyran counted, Tyson blindly groped on the floor. When he found what he was looking for, he was so punch drunk, he put his mouthpiece in upside-down. It hung from his teeth like oatmeal from a baby's mouth.

By the time Tyson pulled himself up, his eyes saw only darkness. Meyran had counted him out as Tyson stood with his back to the ring, staring at the crowd. It was over at 1:23 of the 10th round, or so Douglas thought.

Armed with officials of both the WBC and the WBA, promoter Don King charged immediately that Tyson had been the victim of a long count in the eighth, a story only Pinochio could have come up with.



Referee Meyran counts out Tyson

"The first knockout totally obliterates the second knockout!" King sputtered. "Like it or dislike it, that is the facts. Buster Douglas was knocked out. I'm the promoter of the whole fight! It's my reputation that's gonna be on the line whichever way it goes. It ain't gonna be good for the one who gets the bad decision and it ain't gonna be good for the one who gets a good one. There's a grave misjustice here if the decision holds. Two knockouts took place tonight, but the fact is Buster Douglas got knocked out first. If you go with fair play, you don't have to worry about what nobody says!"

It was suggested that fair play indicated, even if the referee made a mistake, that it was not Douglas' fault. He had lifted himself up when he was told the count was eight, something he could have done earlier if asked. The promoter of the whole fight had no reply.

That night, King and his accomplices burst through a door at the Tokyo Dome in single file around 6:30 p.m. local time, 4:30 a.m. back home. As they did, you had the feeling of what it must be like to stand behind the counter of a convenience store at 4:30 a.m. when a car full of men with shotguns pulls up. You knew the day's receipts were gone. The best you could hope for was that they left you standing.

They were there to steal the heavyweight title from Buster Douglas, but it didn't work this time. The attack dog mentality of the six American writers and a handful of English ones blocked them. You can steal in boxing, but not in broad daylight, so in the end Douglas retained his title and signed a contract worth $29-million with a Las Vegas casino owner named Steve Wynn.

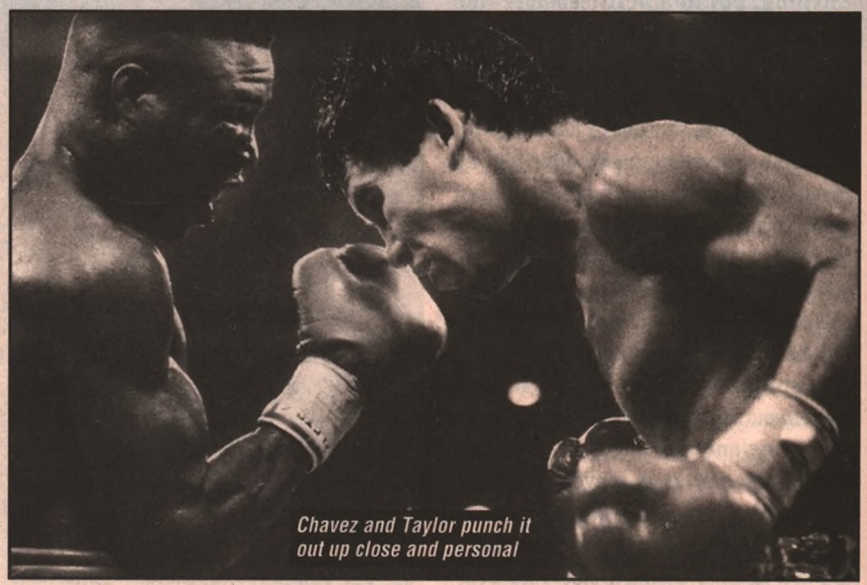
Six months later, beset by a growing list of personal problems, despite his newfound financial security, a flabby and undisciplined Douglas lost that championship to Evander Holyfield in his first title defense. It had been a short reign in boxing, but one brilliant afternoon in Tokyo. ■

THE GREATEST FIGHT I EVER SAW

JULIO CESAR CHAVEZ KO 12 MELDRICK TAYLOR

March 17, 1990

By Bernard Fernandez



Chavez and Taylor punch it out up close and personal

In *The Year The Yankees Lost The Pennant*, which was later adapted into the Broadway play and movie *Damn Yankees*, the devil—living in the guise of a certain Mr. Applegate—seeks the immortal soul of long-frustrated, middle-aged Washington Senators fan Joe Hardy. Would Hardy consider swapping his possible ticket to heaven for the guarantee, in the here and now, that he would be transformed into a power-hitting centerfielder who leads his beloved also-rans to the World Series? Such fiction often is rooted in everyone's common ground of dream fulfillment. But you have to wonder, if Mr. Applegate were to introduce himself to Meldrick Taylor now, would the two-time former world champion from Philadelphia barter away a chance at eternal peace for two seconds worth of earthly reprieve?

Oh, sure, maybe if Taylor hadn't been shot down by Julio Cesar Chavez' final-minute right hand and referee Richard Steele's itchy trigger finger, perhaps he still would have ended up virtually penniless and fighting for short money in tank towns. Isn't that how it often is for boxing's best and brightest once their skills, if not necessarily their ambition, begin to fade? But even if that were not the case, you have to figure there's at least a chance Taylor would have traded it all—the fame, fortune, and a bit more of an extended stay on top—for the satisfaction of winning the most important fight of his career, and the freedom from self-doubts and recriminations.

You think Eugenia Williams' scorecard for the first Lennox Lewis-Evander Holyfield fight was controversial? Or Mike Tyson's ear-gnawing in his rematch with Commander Vander? Those events almost pale in comparison to the profound, irreversible tailspin into which Taylor was plunged as the result of those two lost seconds. Never in the history of boxing has one man lost so much in the literal blink of an eye.

Not that any of us knew that at the time. Yes, there was an expectation of a great fight, and Taylor, an Olympic gold medalist at 17 and the IBF junior welterweight champion, and Mexican legend Chavez, the WBC super lightweight titlist, did not disappoint. Their March 1990 showdown at the Las Vegas Hilton was that rarest of fights, one that not only lived up to the hype, but surpassed it.

> "Never in the history of boxing has one man lost so much in the literal blink of an eye."

Most boxing writers figured Chavez, widely considered to be the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world, would wear Taylor down with his relentless power and numbing bodypunching. A few, myself included, believed Taylor's incredible hand speed would give Chavez problems he had never previously encountered.

For round after exhilarating round, the two undefeated, superbly gifted champions threw themselves at each other with extraordinary ferocity. As the final moments of one of the great boxing matches of all-time wound down, a bloodied, battered, and bone-tired Taylor appeared on the verge of scoring a landmark upset. He was well ahead on two of the three official score-

cards; all he had to do was finish the 12th round.

Then the unthinkable happened. Chavez buckled Taylor's knees with an overhand right with 26 seconds left. Another huge right hand from Chavez 16 seconds before the final bell sent Taylor to the canvas for the first knockdown of the fight.

What followed was a maelstrom of accusations and counter-accusations that made for a perfectly awful ending to what had been a perfectly wonderful battle between outstanding champions.

A tape of the bout shows that Taylor got up at the count of five. Steele continued counting to eight, then asked the fighter if he was okay. Taylor didn't answer, but looked toward his corner. Again, Steele asked Taylor if he was all right. Again, there was no response.

Perhaps Steele did not notice Taylor's barely perceptible nodding of the head. Perhaps the referee was not convinced Taylor was as prepared to continue as he later claimed. In any case, Steele, who was working his 70th world title fight, abruptly waved an end to the bout at the 2:58 mark.

"I wasn't hurt," protested Taylor, who was briefly hospitalized for a fractured left orbit bone and severe dehydration. "I got caught with the right hand because I couldn't see the punch coming. But I got right up at five. I heard the count. I stood still to let [Steele] know I wasn't on queer street.

"I can't remember Steele saying anything. If he did say anything, it might have been, 'Are you okay?' I nodded my head yes, I'm ready to fight. I was fully conscious and I wasn't wobbly." Said Steele: "I looked into Taylor's eyes and saw a beaten fighter. I saw a fighter that had had enough."

Lou Duva, Taylor's co-manager, was livid. Didn't Steele know that Chavez had advanced far out of the neutral corner? And didn't the referee see the flashing red light directly in his face that indicated the bout was a heartbeat or two from completion?

"We were winning the fight for 11 rounds, 2 minutes and 58 seconds, and then the referee took it away from us," Duva complained. "I'm accusing him of taking it away from us. He didn't do the job he was supposed to do out there."

Argue, if you must, whether Steele erred on the side of caution. One thing, however, is undisputable: Taylor, after winning the WBA welterweight title from Aaron Davis on January 19, 1991, continued a slide that almost everyone agrees stems from the physical punishment he absorbed in the devastating loss to Chavez. In the last of his five high-paying fights on HBO, on October 31, 1992, he lost the WBA title when he was stopped in eight rounds by little-known Venezuelan Crisanto Espana in London.

A groggy Taylor struggles to get up

"Espana is no champion. Meldrick would have taken him apart a couple of years ago," said Duva, who advised Taylor—then only 25—to retire immediately. "He's liable to be a $300 fighter if he doesn't fight like the real Meldrick Taylor," Duva had said the day before the Espana debacle. "Where's he going to fight, the Blue Horizon?"

Taylor, whose career began in Madison Square Garden, did, in fact, fight once in the Blue Horizon, losing a split decision to journeyman Darren Maciunski in November '96. That was more than two years after his failed last bid for glory, the September '94 rematch with Chavez in which he was stopped in eight rounds.

"I got suckered into a brawl," Taylor, who had been doing well enough, said of his ill-fated decision to again stand and trade with the harder-punching Chavez. Said Chavez: "This concludes my business with Taylor."

Taylor understands that, but he either can't or won't let go. Dino Duva, Lou's son and the former president of Main Events, estimates that Taylor made—and blew—at least $10-million on poor personal and business decisions.

Within the past 1½ years, Taylor's troubles have continued. He was arbitrarily denied a license to fight in New Jersey by commissioner Larry Hazzard, who said, "Meldrick Taylor as we knew him certainly is not the Meldrick Taylor of today ... Meldrick is not a main event-caliber fighter anymore, and I believe his skills have eroded to a point where he should not be permitted to fight." Last October, Taylor—in line for a good payday (compared to what he has been getting recently) of $50,000 against comebacking Tony Ayala—was nudged out of the gig by Tony Menefee because promoter Lester Bedford was worried about being crucified by the media.

"Even if Meldrick can still fight a little, and I think he can, I know I'd be criticized for matching him with Tony," Bedford said. "I just think it's better if we went with someone else." So Taylor, 33, soldiers on, his speech noticeably slurred and his hands even more noticeably slowed. And you have to wonder if he would have found himself in this condition had only he been given the benefit of two misspent seconds.

"I don't think it's ever one fight that does it, but I don't think Meldrick was ever really the same after he fought Chavez," Lou Duva said. ■

THE GREATEST FIGHT I EVER SAW

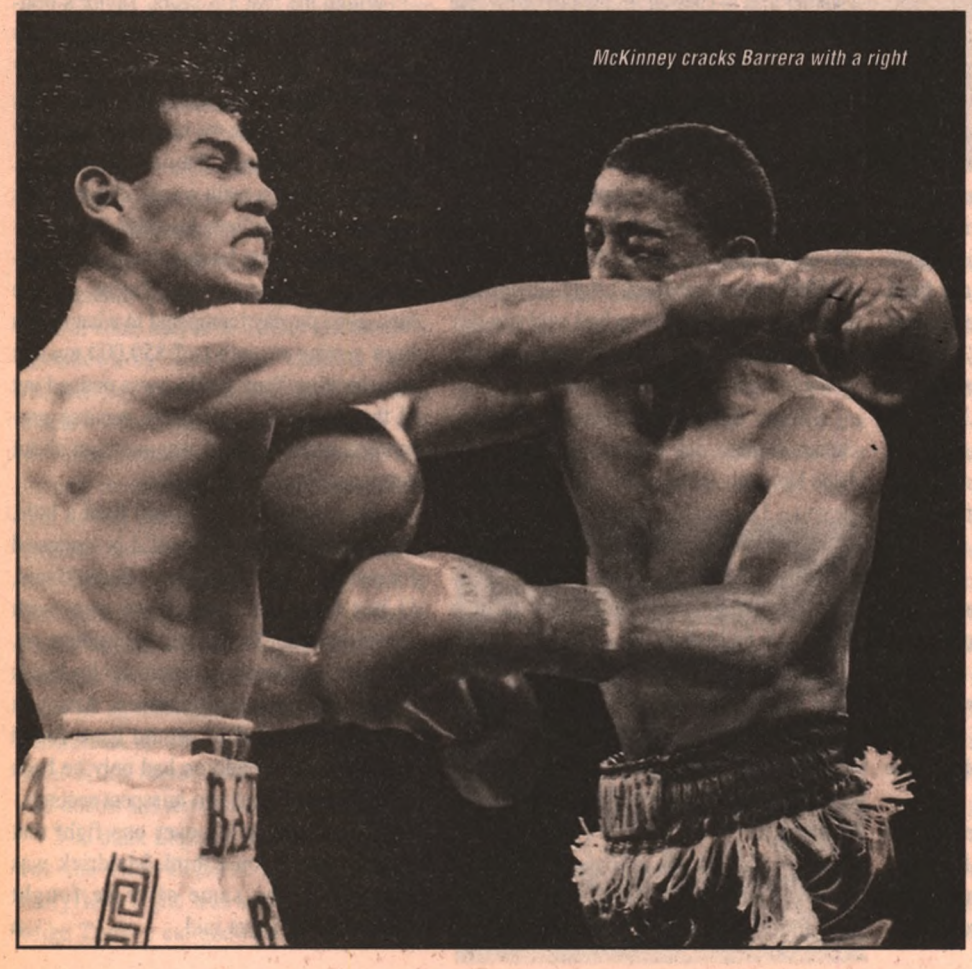
MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA KO 12 KENNEDY McKINNEY

February 3, 1996

"They kept turning it up a notch, daring the other man to follow—back and forth, leading and countering, countering the counters, countering the counters against those counters."

By Ivan Goldman

When you're fortunate enough to attend a truly great fight, a historic match, you don't hear anybody saying things like, "This has to be the greatest fight I've ever seen." Not while it's going on, anyway. You holler yourself hoarse and yell out advice and appreciation, but you make no direct comment about the other-worldly excellence of what you're witnessing. It's like a no-hitter in baseball. You don't want to jinx what's in front of you.

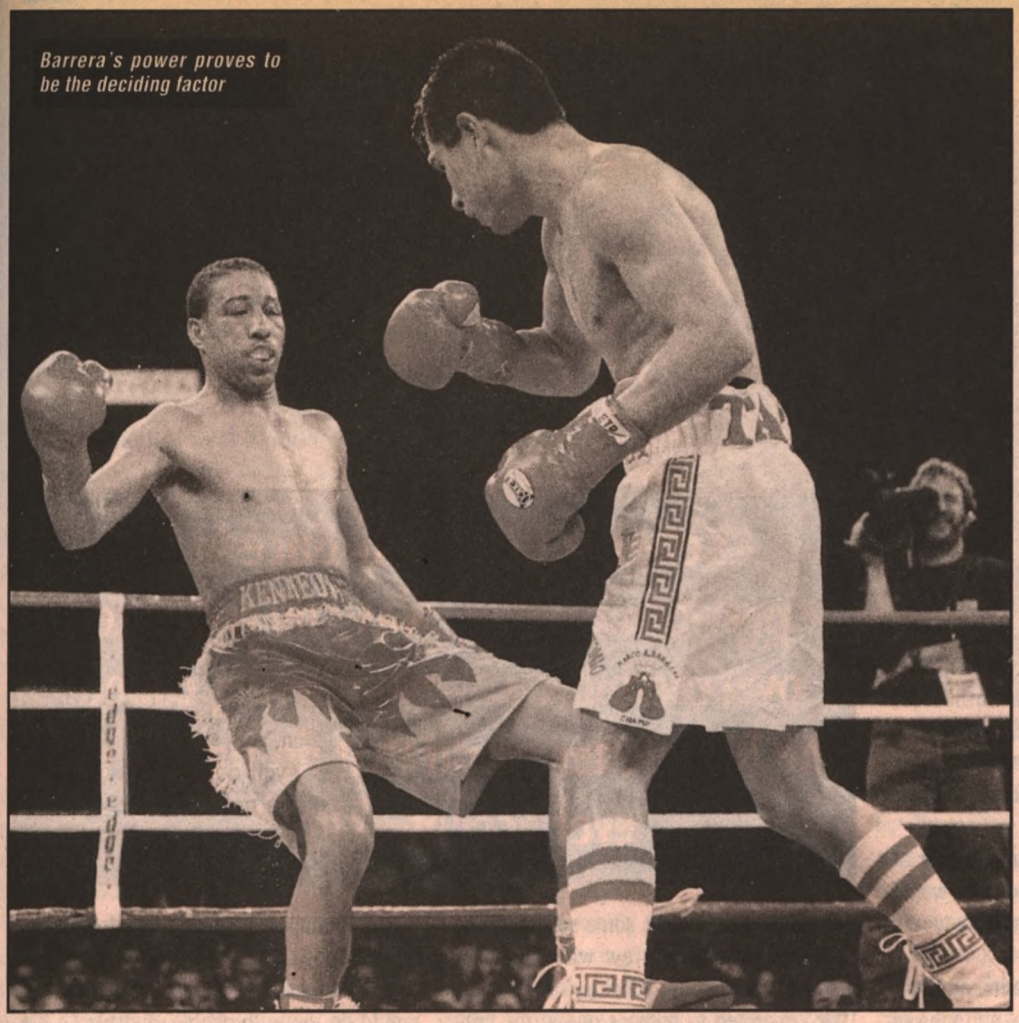


McKinney cracks Barrera with a right

That's the way it was when Marco Antonio Barrera fought Kennedy McKinney in a junior featherweight match at the Great Western Forum in Southern California.

Writers trying to describe such a night often say it was electric. But the word doesn't suffice—not to those who experienced it. What goes on is felt deeply by everyone, from the three men inside the ring to the fans back in the Afghanistan seats. And because everyone knows that everyone else knows it, too, the feeling is almost spiritual, a communal understanding. You're all winners around a hotter than hot craps table. It's finding what you seek. It's love and excitement. It's a sweet night.

But the two fighters, although exulting in the magnificent force of the moment, are also suffering from their courage. While landing their own ferocious shots, they're getting countered with the same



Barrera's power proves to be the deciding factor

kinds of punches, all the while hoping the other guy will fall down for good or holler uncle and put an end to the agony and the ecstasy.

Such a war can shorten a career by years. But on this night, when the two fighters were Barrera and McKinney, neither man would ratchet down the action. Instead, they kept turning it up a notch, daring the other man to follow—back and forth, leading and countering, countering the counters, countering the counters against those counters. Quick, fast, clever, vicious, beautiful, clean shots, over and over. Every minute of every round. No clinches. Just split-second, super-skilled savagery.

And every three minutes, the fighters would retreat to their stools while their frantic cornermen tried to patch them up and plead that they do this, do that, and stop doing things they didn't want them to do. After a round of such ferocity, Barrera and McKinney no doubt figured getting yelled at for a minute was a terrific deal.

In California, we think we probably know a little more about the game than fans in other places because we are more apt to appreciate smaller fighters. They are an acquired taste, like sophisticated jazz or fine wine. There were almost 8,000 of us there that night. A very respectable number in any town. Forum Boxing was a powerhouse promoter, and we weren't surprised to be getting such an important fight. L.A. had seen plenty of them.

Only a WBO title was at stake, but that was just politics. We expected something extraordinary. The 22-year-old Barrera, 39-0 (27) going in, had fought many times at the Forum, and we felt he was about to become the next great Mexican legend.

But former Olympian and ex-IBF champ McKinney, 22-1-1 (17), eight years older, was a formidable boxer-puncher with a big, slick right hand. This bout was crucial to him. He was very dangerous, and some smart analysts thought he would prevail.

This would be the very first fight televised by *Boxing After Dark*. No one quite knew what that meant, but we knew it was HBO, and that was good enough.

The mostly Latin crowd was nuts for Barrera, a native of Mexico City, and although McKinney entered the ring with a Lakers jersey, the fans treated him with the same affection taxpayers feel for IRS auditors.

McKinney lost most of the rounds, but he was always in the fight and proved his skill and indomitable will by coming back to easily take the 10th and 11th rounds. Before he finally ended it at the 2:05 mark of the 12th, Barrera scored four official knockdowns and had been knocked down once himself.

What I remember most is the *thunk* of Barrera's left hook to the liver. I heard it and felt it over the roar of the crowd. It was an inhuman punch, and although McKinney landed many a right hand over the top, I don't know how he took such cruel shots.

After defeating McKinney, Barrera, the victim of poor management, fought too frequently. He became more and more flat-footed while advancing with those thundering hooks to the body, oblivious to what the other fighter might do in return. Perhaps he was trying to relive the wonder of that night. But reality and too many shots caught up to him, and that November, Junior Jones ended his unbeaten streak in the fifth round.

McKinney tried to become more of a boxer again, but he would still trade when he felt the need. At least for a while, he got his career back on track. But in truth, neither fighter was ever the same.

We didn't know it, but Southern California boxing was at the top of a hill, about to slide to the bottom. HBO's *Boxing After Dark* became a greater success than anyone dreamed, but the show never returned to the Forum. The Forum never had such an important fight again, and four years later, it shut down its boxing program altogether. ■

THE GREATEST FIGHT I EVER SAW

KEVIN KELLEY KO 8 DERRICK GAINER

June 15, 1996

By Johnnie Whitehead

> "Kelley, a loser only once in 46 previous outings, was still trying to overcome the stigma of being called the four-letter world that no fighter will ever accept—shot."

While preparing for a fight, not too many boxers have it better than Derrick "Smoke" Gainer. True, until recently, Pensacola, Florida, never has been known as a hotbed for practitioners of the Sweet Science. But personal tutelage from Pensacola's most famous prize fighter has more than made up for a lack of tradition.

"I owe him everything," said Gainer of his mentor, Roy Jones. "The best way I can repay him is by becoming a world champion."

Jones, pound-for-pound claimant, then-super middleweight champion, and king of all egos before him and since, saw potential in Gainer, and made him his understudy. It would, of course, be too much to ask of Gainer to be just like his benefactor, because only once in a generation—if that—could a man endowed with such amazing physical gifts as Jones come along. But when the bell would sound, there were traces of The Master's influence on Smoke. Both held their hands waist high, allowing them to pull the trigger more fluidly at a moment's notice. Both moved about the ring as gracefully as if they were sliding on ice, not a musty, blood-splattered canvas.

There was, however, something missing from Gainer, who already had lost three times in 20 outings. It was one of those abstract qualities that can't be quantified—heart, courage, intelligence. Those intangibles make good fighters great ones, and Gainer would soon find out which was the missing link.

Wildly entertaining fights have been relatively rare in an age when practically everybody seems to be some sort of champion or another, and few who made the trek to Jacksonville, Florida, on June 15, 1996, expected to witness one at the coliseum. The city hadn't hosted a world title fight since in the late-1800s, when James J. Corbett defended the heavyweight title against Charley Mitchell. But Jones had hoped to make history in this adopted city, where he played for the Barracudas, a semi-professional basketball team. He would do the unthinkable, and play a basketball game and defend the IBF championship all in the same day.

The problem was that the attention-starved point guard who scored five points

Gainer takes control early

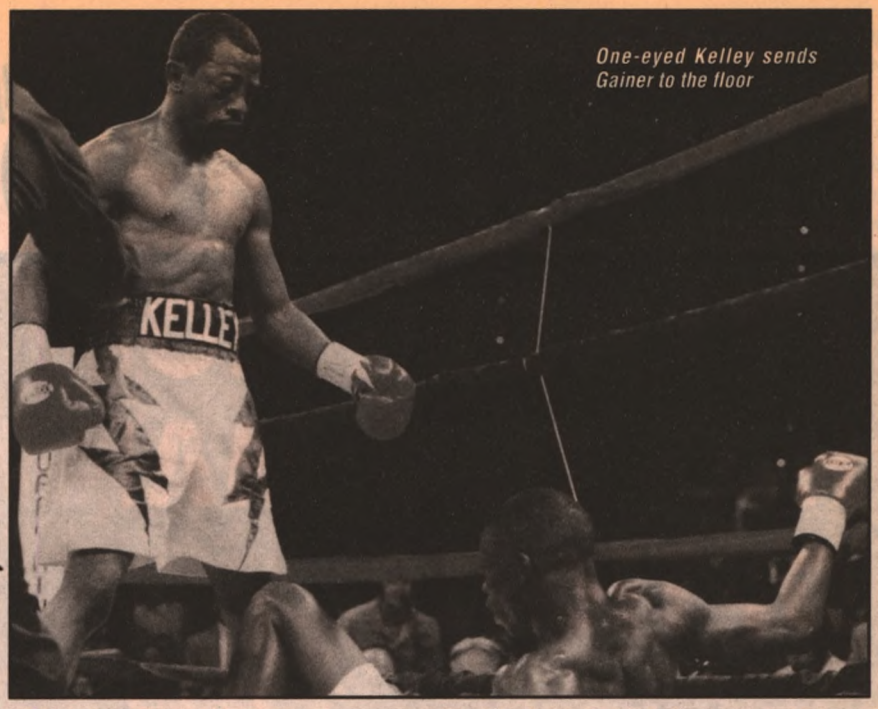
in the 'Cudas' victory that afternoon wasn't fighting a skilled challenger. Instead, he hand-picked Eric Lucas, a limited French-Canadian who was tortured for 11 woefully redundant, lopsided rounds before the fight was stopped. It was hardly an edifying career moment for Jones, and the only thing the fight proved was that his opponent deserved the George Chuvalo Award for his ability to take one helluva beating.

But only an hour earlier, a bout had taken place that was everything the Jones-Lucas fight wasn't. Gainer faced a career-defining moment before the 7,200 in attendance and millions around the world watching him vs. Kevin Kelley on HBO. It was a couple of spindly featherweights vying for another little-known, lightly regarded, and rarely respected governing body's title. A former world champion who was considered washed-up against a whippersnapper who so far had shown more flash than fighter.

Kelley, a loser only once in 46 previous outings, was still trying to overcome the stigma of being called the four-letter world that no fighter will ever accept—shot. He had lifted the WBC feather crown from Goyo Vargas just a few years before, but he lost it in an all-out brawl with Alejandro Gonzalez that left both eyes decimated and his confidence shaken. Now, the 28-year-old ex-champ found himself in the role of an opponent.

At end of the four rounds, "The Flushing Flash" moped back to his corner after getting knocked down by a series of punches, none of which appeared hard enough to have taken him off of his feet. But a grazing right hook that started the flurry had clipped Kelley's right eye. Almost instantly, a grotesque swelling appeared both above and below the eye, which quickly became an oozing slit. The question was no longer if Gainer would win, but how long referee Frank Santore would allow Kelley to continue before he stopped the fight.

Although Gainer appeared to have the upper hand, until the eye injury the outcome was still in doubt. The rangy Gainer showed a stinging jab and serviceable power in both fists. He moved about the ring with the rhythm of a *Soul Train* dancer, as his punches flowed smoothly and plentifully. Kelley, on the other hand, was methodical and flat-footed, hands high but head stationary. Physically, it was a mismatch, which Kelley acknowledged before the fight.



One-eyed Kelley sends Gainer to the floor

"All you have to do is look at the two of us to see what the fight is all about," said Kelley. "I've got to get inside to his body. He wants to keep me outside at the end of his long punching range."

Gainer did exactly that when he dropped Kelley with a searing straight left in the third. It was mistakenly ruled it a slip, but Smoke sensed his man was stunned and went for the finish. Much to his surprise, Kelley slipped under a straight left and countered with a left hook of his own that put Gainer down, shaking his confidence more than his legs. Then in the next round, Kelley went down again, and his eyes ballooned.

"Look at me! Look at me!" ordered trainer Phil Borgia when Kelley got back to his corner. "We trained to fight with no goddamn eyes. You got that?"

"Gotcha," Kelley answered.

The bell sounded for the fifth, and Kelley pressed the action. He looped another left over the top, and it landed high on the forehead and folded Gainer to the floor for a four-count. The stricken fighter had to use the second rope as leverage to right himself, and once he did, he ran for dear life before finally gathering himself and firing back just enough to last the round.

But following a minute on his stool, a revitalized Gainer swept the sixth and seventh, and victory was in reach. The old man in the opposite corner, however, was waiting for something. Like George Foreman when he regained the heavyweight crown from Michael Moorer, Kelley knew he could never decision Gainer in a boxing match. So he allowed the younger man to get comfortable leading with punches. Kelley figured that maybe, just maybe, he could seize the perfect time to counter.

Knowing that the eighth probably would be his last chance, the partially blind Kelley came out brawling. Disregarding the tenet that The Master had taught him for years—hit and not be hit—Gainer opted to please his admirers by engaging Kelley at close quarters, finishing his combinations with ripping right hooks to the body. Then, just as Smoke was ready to cap the show with a knockout, lightning struck a third time, and left him short-circuited for good.

It happened as the two exchanged at ring center. Gainer floated out a lazy southpaw jab. It was the last time he'd make such a mistake—at least that night. Kelley, who had just switched from his normal lefthanded stance to an orthodox posture, saw the opening he'd been waiting for and unleashed an arching left. The whistling blow crashed home and sent Smoke sprawling to the canvas, stiff-legged, eyes locked in the back of his head. This time, Gainer didn't get up, and Santore counted him at the 2:16 mark.

"I didn't realize that he switched," a bemused Smoke explained later.

The question of what was lacking had finally been answered. Let it be said that it wasn't heart or courage. ■

RETIREMENT POSTPONED!

EVANDER HOLYFIELD HAS TOO MANY OPTION$

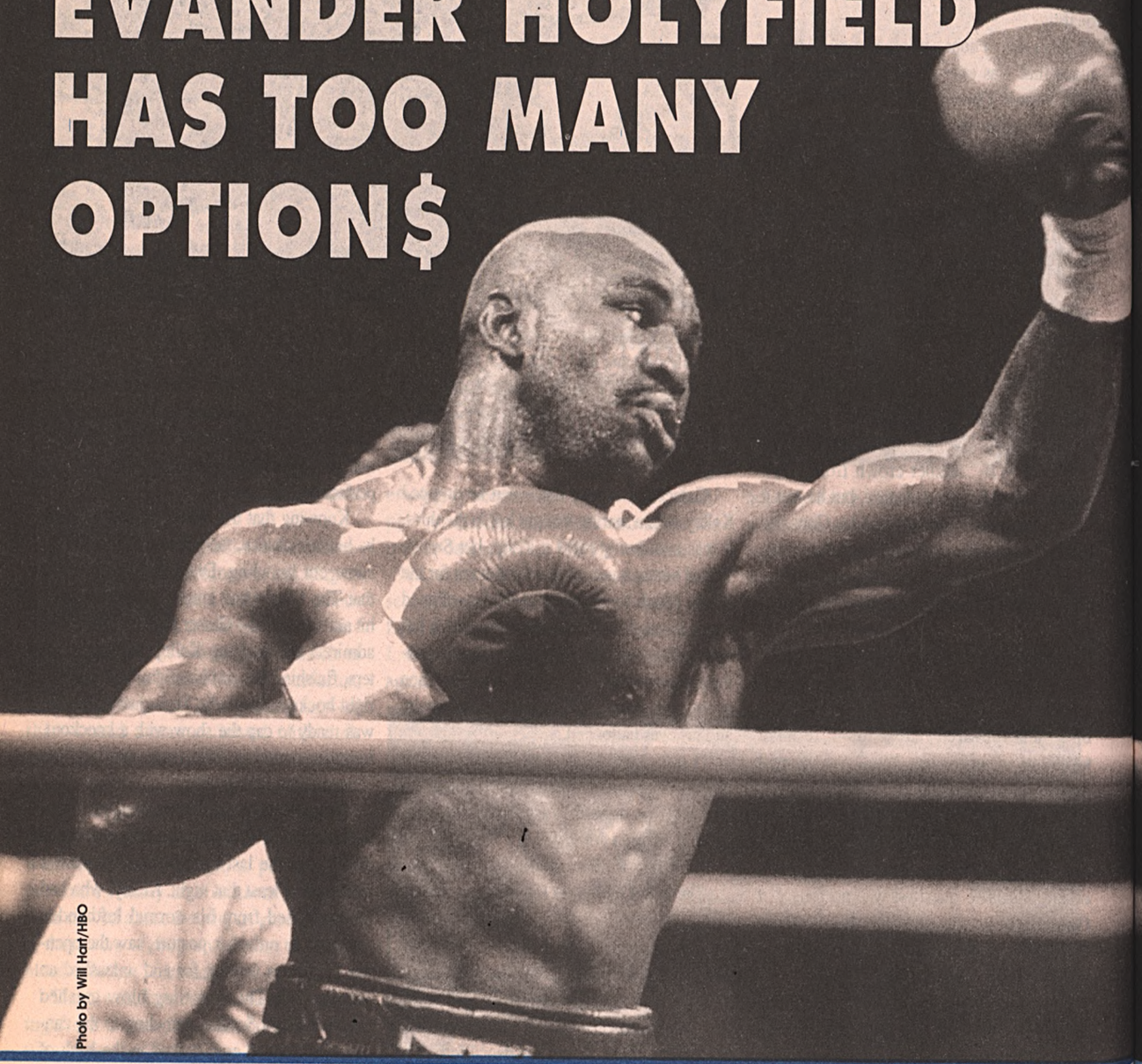


Photo by Will Hart/HBO

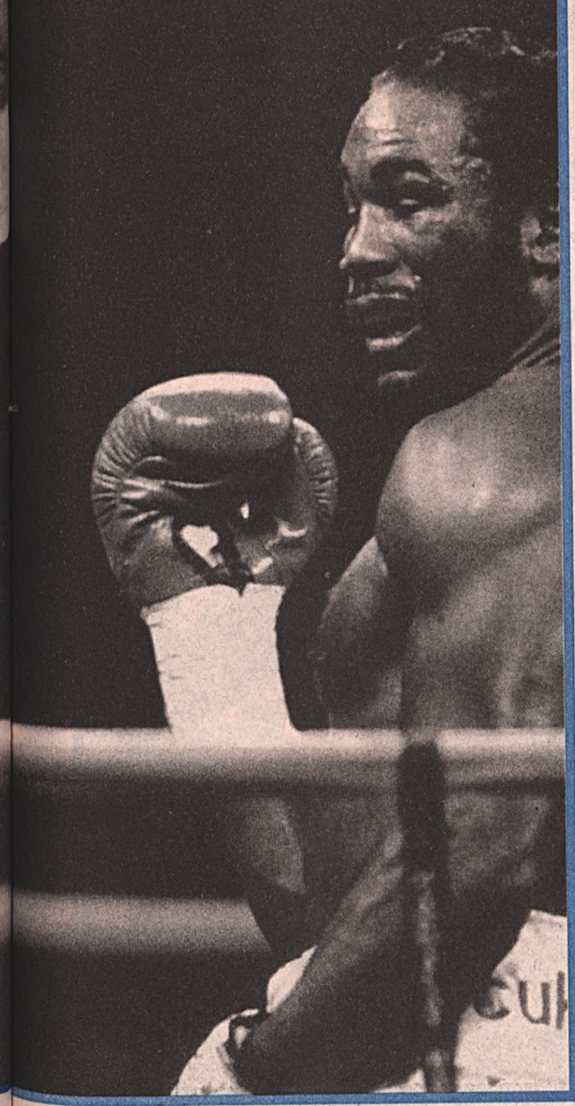
By Tim Graham

Evander Holyfield is standing at the crossroads. He looks to his left, then to his right. He can't sense any oncoming traffic, but he knows it's on its way. He just doesn't quite know when the time will come. He knows the longer he waits, the better the chance he'll get blindsided. But he's not ready to cross over to the other side yet. He's not ready to cross the intersection that is retirement.

On the surface, it doesn't appear there is much more Holyfield can accomplish on this side of the street. He has won six world titles, three at cruiserweight and three more at heavyweight. He has beaten the major fighters of his era—even though the judges didn't always agree—and even some from eras gone by. He reached true sports icon status with his memorable performances and humble-yet-engaging personality.

That warrior persona Holyfield always has aspired to maintain will never be doubted, not considering the myriad dramatic comebacks he mounted in and out of the ring. Nevertheless, Holyfield believes there still is work to be done before he crosses that road. While he stopped working on his ring resume long ago, he continues to move forward on a more inspirational level.

Holyfield believes that his performance in the second Lennox Lewis fight proves that he still has a lot left at age 37. Now he wants an opportunity to become the first fighter in history to win the heavyweight title four times.



"He wants to inspire people to an even greater degree than he has before," said Holyfield's attorney/adviser, Jim Thomas.

Holyfield helped found a family-oriented, gospel-based TV network last year in Detroit, but he knows the best way to reach and inspire people is through boxing. And any doubts that his career couldn't help him attain that goal were allayed on November 13.

Many in the media were begging Holyfield to retire as he headed into his rematch with Lennox Lewis. It was hard to blame them. Holyfield looked terrible in their first fight eight months earlier. He seemed slow, sloppy, shot. He was beaten up, down, inside, and outside, but one of the most ridiculous decisions in sports history gave him a gift draw. It seemed as if the rematch was nothing more than a formality so that Lewis could be given his due. Lewis was expected to dominate again.

Holyfield turned 37 a month before the rematch, and boxing observers feared he would face the same fate Muhammad Ali had in the waning stages if his career. Ali, the only heavyweight other than Holyfield to win the title three times, was 38 when Larry Holmes nearly pummeled him into oblivion, a beating many claim helped precipitate Ali's debilitated state.

But while certainly not the same fighter he was a few years ago, Holyfield looked far from shot on November 13. He took the fight to Lewis in virtually every round and stood strong the few times his opponent became aggressive. When the final bell sounded, many of the fans at the Thomas & Mack Center and of the millions more watching around the world on pay-per-view pegged Holyfield the winner. Even Lewis' British minions, rowdily chanting at the start of the bout, were silent before the decision was announced.

Lewis was declared a unanimous decision winner, and many of the same writers and sports anchors who feared for Holyfield's safety 58 minutes earlier were incensed by the verdict. They felt Holyfield had been cheated. Holyfield called it "the boomerang."

Even though he wasn't awarded the victory, Holyfield proved he isn't too old to continue his crusade. He had so much energy left after his "loss" that he went out dancing with rapper-friend LL Cool J at 3 a.m. the next morning without having slept.

"That's not an old man," Thomas said. "He's in phenomenal shape."

With Holyfield's skills still effective, there are too many meaningful fights left for him to retire now. One of the more tempting challenges is becoming the first four-time champ in heavyweight history. Then there is Holyfield-Lewis III and Holyfield-Tyson III. And don't forget about the possibilities—as remote as they may seem right now—of fighting some of the division's young guns, or even Roy Jones.

According to Thomas, Holyfield will continue to fight for Don King Productions, but "The Real Deal" is a free agent when it comes to his TV network, making him an attractive option for both HBO/TVKO and Showtime/SET.

"There's no question is his mind or my mind that he can compete with anybody in the world," Thomas said. "But it's a risk-reward analysis. What do you get out of any particular fight as opposed to what you risk? If he were to fight just another opponent in just another fight, the question would be 'Why?' There's got to be another reason. Fighting a meaningless fight for money is something he's not inclined to do. He's accomplished everything he's intended to accomplish.

"The incentive is that he's always seen himself as going out on top. When we went on this quest in 1996 [after his second loss to Riddick Bowe and the third of his career], he wanted to become a three-time heavyweight champ. He now can become the first four-time champ and leave it to the younger generation. That's his plan."

Photo by Jed Jacobsohn/Allsport

A third fight with Mike Tyson is still a possibility, especially if Tyson can somehow win a title beforehand. But even without a belt at stake, the lure of another monster payday could put Holyfield back in the ring with his most famous opponent.

How he executes that plan will take time. It's difficult for any fighter, regardless of whether or not he was robbed, to get a title fight after a loss. That's why Holyfield is content to sit back awhile before he plots his next move.

"My heart is set. I really do want to fight," Holyfield told ESPN in December. "But I just want to wait and give it time where I'm not going to make a decision out of emotion and just get in there and do something that will only benefit me. The decisions that I make have to be for my whole family and what's good for my kids, how this is going to shape my life. If this is going to hurt somebody, am I doing this for a selfish reason?

"I want to do things for a good reason, and pray about things so I'm not doing it out of emotion and say, 'I want to get him' just to get him, because revenge is the Lord's; it's not mine."

Right now, all roads obviously lead to Lewis, who holds all the belts. Until he drops one of them, Holyfield will have to bide his time for another shot.

"That's one reason that I don't know if I want to go back, because I don't want to wait in a long line," Holyfield said. "My health is good, but I really don't want to wait. I feel a good fight like I fought, the people should want to see it [again].

"I'd like to fight him as soon as possible," Holyfield said, "but if that doesn't happen, I have to ask myself, 'What reason is there to fight if I can't go for the gusto?'"

There are other options. Some can be affected by Holyfield's stablemate, top contender Michael Grant, who also is advised by Thomas.

"It appears at this moment that the only really big-money fights would be Lennox Lewis, Mike Tyson, or Roy Jones," Thomas said. "That could change, but at the moment Evander doesn't need to make any decisions. The heavyweight landscape needs to settle a little bit, and it will depend on what Lennox Lewis' next fight is and what Michael Grant's next fight is. We just need to see what happens.

"If one were to be on a plan to get a title fight by the end of 2000, it probably is not in Evander's best interest to lay idle for a year, particularly at this stage of his career when an athlete's skills can deteriorate if they're not kept in tune. He probably would have to do something this spring. If a title is available, great. But if you're not going to fight for a title, you might as well fight for big money."

That's where Tyson and Jones come in. Of the fighters on Holyfield's hit list, Tyson is the farthest from a title. The most likely scenario would be if Tyson wins in January against Julius Francis and then beats Lewis. Holyfield has predicted Tyson would beat Lewis because of Lewis' passive style.

"Tyson likes people who wait around," Holyfield said. "I think the way Tyson fights, Tyson would win because Tyson will run you out of there if you wait on him."

But even if that doesn't happen, and Tyson doesn't regain a championship, the money for a third fight with Iron Mike might still be too much for Holyfield to ignore.

"There's just so much interest," Thomas said.

Holyfield doesn't necessarily need the

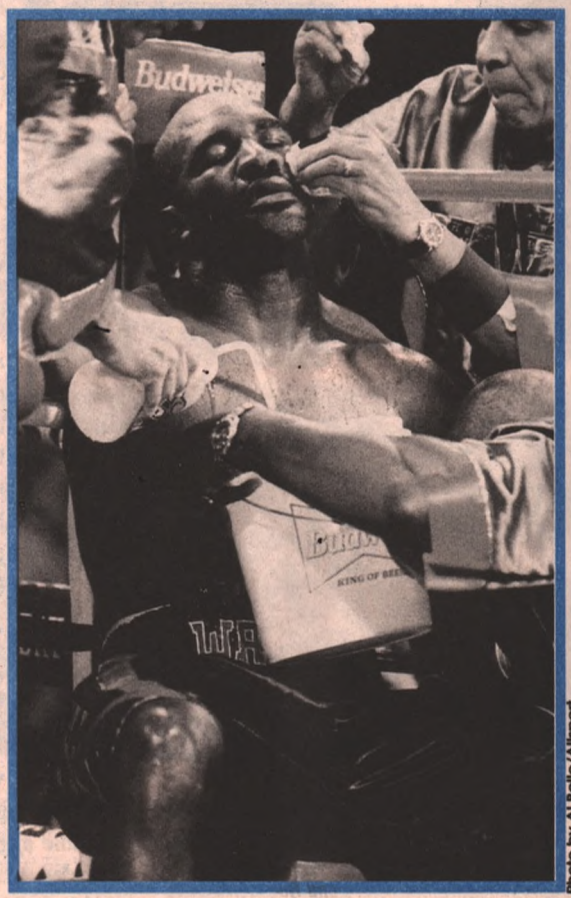


Photo by Al Bello/Allsport

Holyfield's corner works on him between rounds of the second Lewis fight. Despite losing the bout on the judges' scorecards, "The Real Deal" still had enough energy to go dancing afterward.

money, but he is going through a bitter divorce and has enough illegitimate children to make the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe blush. He won't come out and say it, but it would be nice to have a multi-million-dollar purse to subsidize his obligations.

"To fight him, I'd rather fight him in a championship bout," said Holyfield of a third fight with Tyson. "I wouldn't just fight for money, even though you know it would be there because people pay to see two guys fight. That's why me and Tyson have been big draws."

A bout with light heavyweight champ Jones—widely considered the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world—would be huge as well. That match is unlikely to ever come off, though. Jones traveled to Holyfield's hometown of Atlanta in late-1998 to discuss the possibility, but talks didn't really go anywhere.

"Evander's sort of a purist of the sport, and sees a Jones fight as a spectacle more than a fight," Thomas said. "There's certainly a lot of interest in that fight, but at this point I'd have to view it as a long shot because of his views on it."

Photo by Tom Casino

Although anything is possible, it's unlikely Holyfield will fight buddy Michael Grant. Commander Vander was a member of the wedding party when Grant and his bride, Tanya, were married in 1998.

Holyfield isn't too thrilled about fighting the young group of heavyweight contenders that includes David Tua, Ike Ibeabuchi (if he can stay out of jail), and Grant. He always viewed himself within a certain generation of fighters, and wants to compete exclusively in that realm if he can.

"There's been no ultimate decision that he won't do that, but his preference has been to fight and defeat all the fighters of his era," Thomas said. "If it were a steppingstone to a title, that might change. Or if that's what it took to get into position to reunite the titles, then maybe he'd fight a David Tua to do that."

One thing is almost for certain: A fight with Grant won't happen. The two are too close. Holyfield was a member of Grant's wedding party.

"They both decided they don't want to do that," Thomas said. "You can never say never in this game, but it's highly unlikely."

Even if Grant weren't a close friend, he wouldn't fit too well in Holyfield's big picture. It all goes back to Thomas' "risk-reward analysis"; Grant simply wouldn't help Holyfield reach that lofty plateau he envisions.

It's a level on par with Ali himself, but Holyfield understands he needs to more than merely share the mantle of three-time heavyweight world champion to be mentioned in the same breath as The Greatest.

When Holyfield looks at Ali, he doesn't see someone ravaged by Parkinson's. He sees a hero who transcends sport. He'd like the world to view him in that same manner. "The most important thing I think of when I see Ali is the lives that Ali touched," Holyfield said. "You could never really clench what all he's done because you can never know all the lives he's touched. And you just hope that your career won't just be measured by boxing. It's how many lives you've touched.

"Ali came at a time when the people were depressed, and when Ali won, the people won. He stood up for what he believed."

Holyfield, despite his age and all the advice telling him to quit before he gets hurt, stands tall himself, even if it is at a crossroads. ■

Tim Graham is a freelance writer based in Las Vegas and a regular contributor to this magazine.

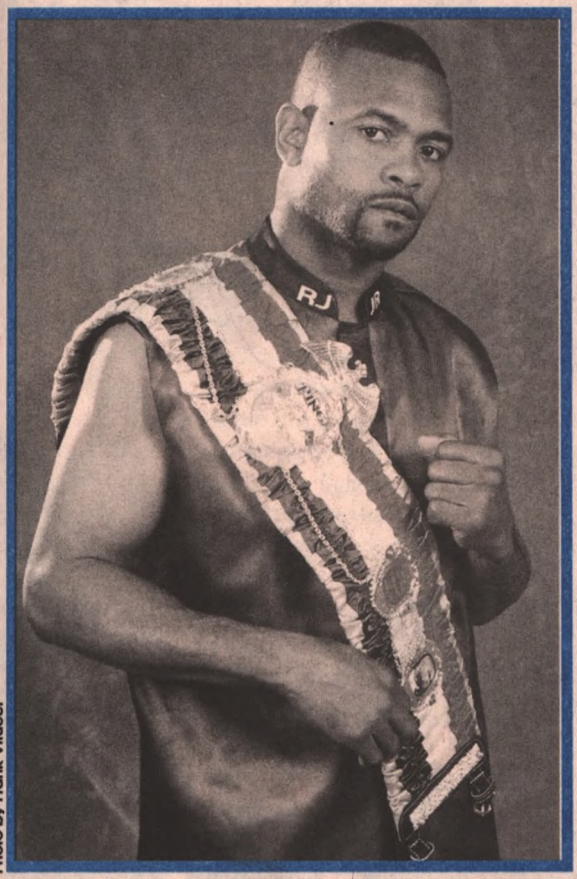
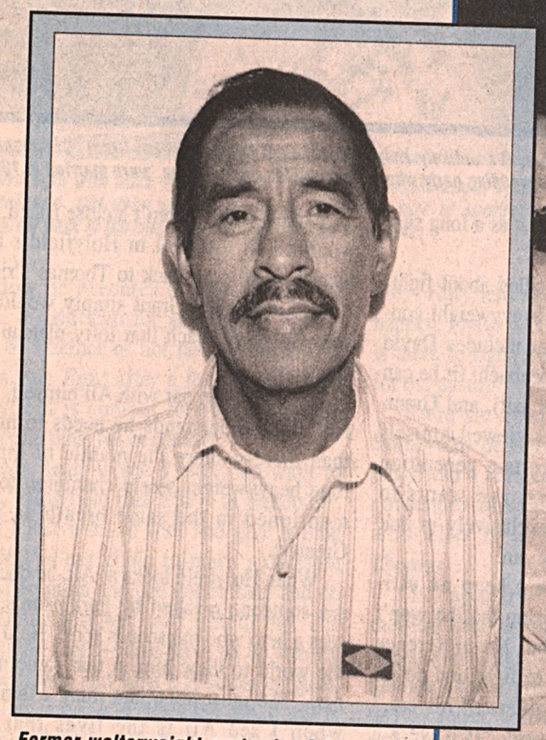


Photo by Frank Vitucci

A fight between Holyfield and Roy Jones would fascinate fans and probably do great at the box office, but when Holyfield and THE RING's pound-for-pound champ got together to talk about it in 1998, they failed to come to an agreement.

The RING Update

GASPAR ORTEGA



Former welterweight contender Ortega today (above) has a few more wrinkles, but still looks remarkably like he did in 1963 when this publicity shot of him wearing his headdress was taken.

"I Died And I Came Back Again"

By Brian Doogan

Gaspar Ortega's mission is no longer to be champion of the world, but neither is it negligible. In fact, the day he retired from boxing, he embarked on a journey as fraught, humbling, agonizing, dispiriting, and uplifting as anything he experienced in the ring. Ortega is deeply involved with a program called Project More, whose objective is to rehabilitate troubled juveniles. And it is a task the appealing, gently smiling, benevolent Ortega might have been born for.

"To this day, maybe 30 years after I helped them, I have people come up to me and say, 'You did something for me, you gave me my first chance,' and that is a mutually satisfying feeling," said Ortega, not a pound heavier than in his fighting days when he warred with Benny Paret, Tony DeMarco, Kid Gavilan, Carmen Basilio, and Emile Griffith. "Helping people, getting them employment, ones who have never spoken English being given the encouragement to go to school, it is rewarding and it is more than that.

"I believe I have a mission from God. God sent me, and I am doing his work."

Heavenly utterances are so common among sportspeople today that they tend to induce an indifferent, if not cynical, reaction. The difference with the 64-year-old Ortega is that his deep faith was reaffirmed by a near-death experience over four years ago. Or as he says, "I died and I came back again," pleasantly aware that many were under the grim impression he passed away years ago given his self-imposed absence from the fight circuit.

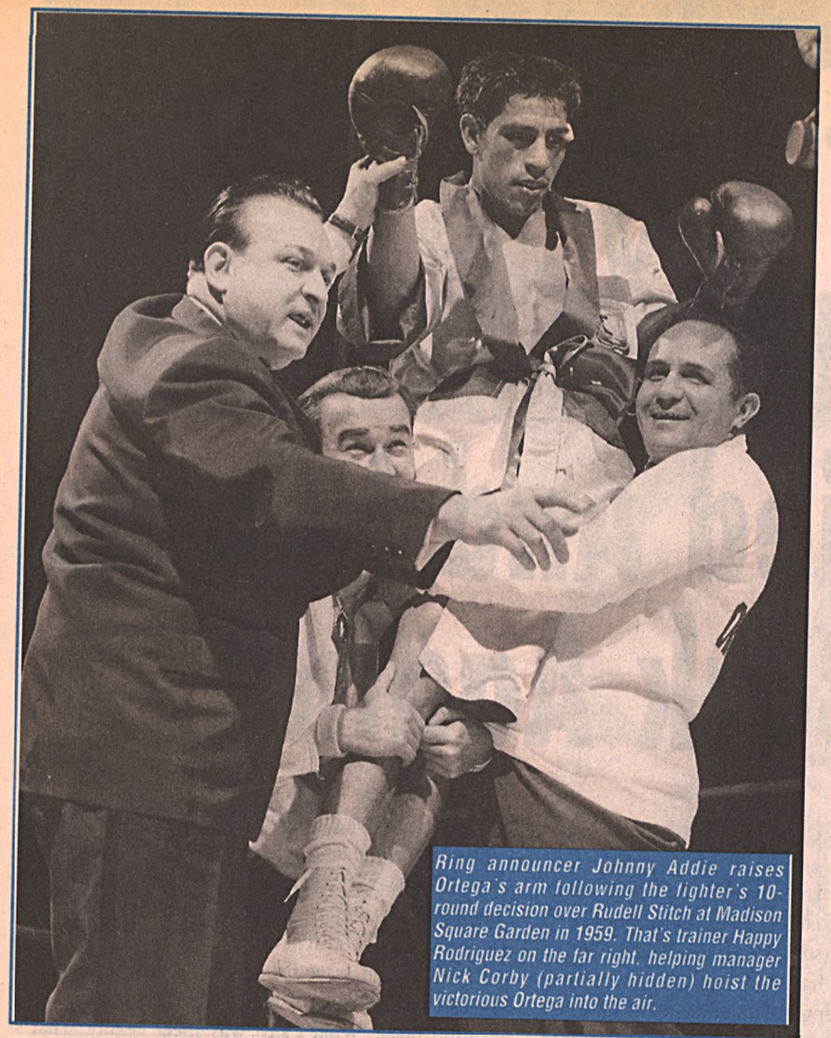
"In 1995, I was diagnosed with throat cancer. It was serious and malignant," Ortega recalled. "The treatment was really heavy, chemotherapy and radiation at the same time. I was in bad shape. I contracted pneumonia and, one night, I just went off.

"I felt myself leave the hospital room, leave Earth. My soul left the bed and kept flying, and I landed in a beautiful place. What I saw was sheer beauty. That's why now I'm not afraid to die.

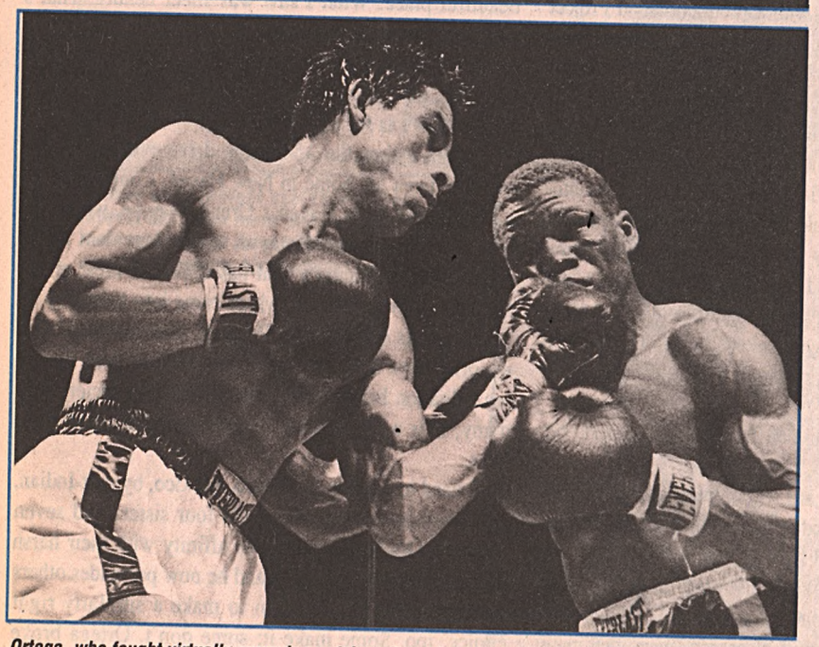
"But God brought me back here, and with the knowledge He gave the doctors, I pulled through. And I believe this was for a reason."

Ortega makes the 15-minute drive every weekday morning from his home in New Haven, Connecticut, to a building on New Haven's Grand Avenue, where the reason for his extended stay is only too evident in the drug-fueled delinquency that has drawn in most of the clientele of Project More, which came into existence 35 years ago as Community Progress Incorporated. The majority have been through prison and require further rehabilitation before being eased back into society. For many, it is a last chance to make something of their lives.

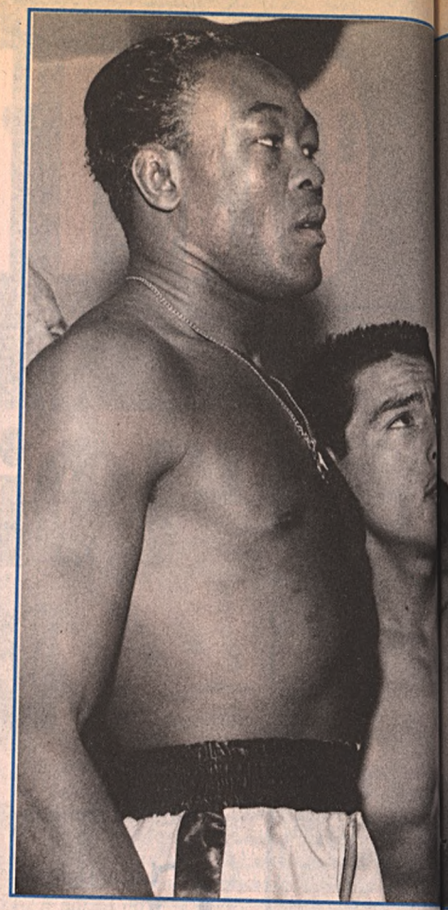
Raised in poverty in Tijuana, Mexico, by part-Indian, part-Mexican parents alongside four sisters and seven brothers, Ortega has an innate affinity with their harsh dilemma. He chose boxing and he now persuades others that they have the freedom to make a similarly right choice, too. Some make it; some don't. Ortega broke down while recounting his involvement with one young boy, the pain as acute as if the boy were his own.



Ring announcer Johnny Addie raises Ortega's arm following the fighter's 10-round decision over Rudell Stitch at Madison Square Garden in 1959. That's trainer Happy Rodriguez on the far right, helping manager Nick Corby (partially hidden) hoist the victorious Ortega into the air.



Ortega, who fought virtually every top-notch welterweight in the late-1950s and early-'60s, lands a left uppercut en route to a 10-round decision over Benny "Kid" Paret in August '59. The next year, Paret won the world title, and Ortega beat the Cuban again in a non-title bout in '61.



"Some collapse, find it very hard to recuperate. That is the nature of what we are dealing with here," he said. "One of the kids, a very nice kid when he's clean, not using drugs, I tried to help, spent many hours with him. But he was up and down, great one day, not so good the next. Only recently, I heard that he is suffering from AIDS. That killed me in my heart."

Ortega composed himself before continuing.

"I love kids. I try to do my best for them. But you cannot force them to do the right or wrong thing. That must come from within. They can only be offered encouragement and a chance. When it doesn't turn out, there is a reason, but that doesn't make it any easier. I was very weak in my feelings when I first came into this job. I'm a little stronger now. But still, some situations hit you more than others.

"A lot of it is to do with lifestyle. They want fast living, easy come, easy go. It's very sad."

Thankfully, not all the cases are.

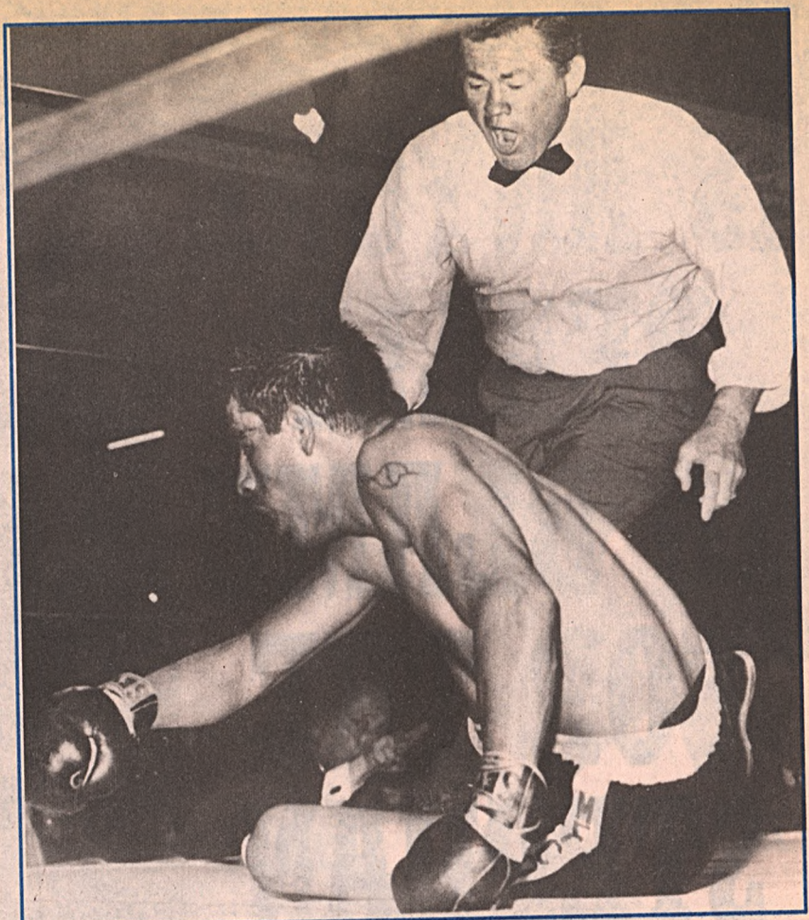
Ortega checks the scale as future Hall of Famer Kid Gavilan weighs in for their 1957 bout in Los Angeles. Ortega went on to win a 12-round decision in what was billed a welterweight championship elimination.

"I had a kid who came a lot to me, Angel Acasta," Ortega added cheerfully. "He was a drug addict as well, and grew attached to me. He had no future, involved all the time in selling and using drugs from marijuana to cocaine. I was talking to him one day, and he said, 'Gaspar, I want to be like you.' 'I don't think so,' I said. I told him he's a young boy, has a lot of opportunities in life to have a better life than me. But no, he wasn't talking about a way of living, he was talking about sport, boxing. He wanted to be a fighter.

"I said I have no time anymore to train people, you should do something better than boxing. It is too hard to make money in fighting. It can take years. I told him to go to college, and gave him the paperwork to enroll for tuition. He went to college having finished his work program. Now he is employed in the city of Harvard, Massachusetts, as the director of a youth center.

"For me, it feels so good. He says I

(Continued on page 74)



In his only shot at a world title, Ortega was stopped by future Hall of Famer Emile Griffith in their 1961 welterweight championship bout in Los Angeles. Ortega was down twice in the seventh before referee Tommy Hart rescued him in the 12th round.

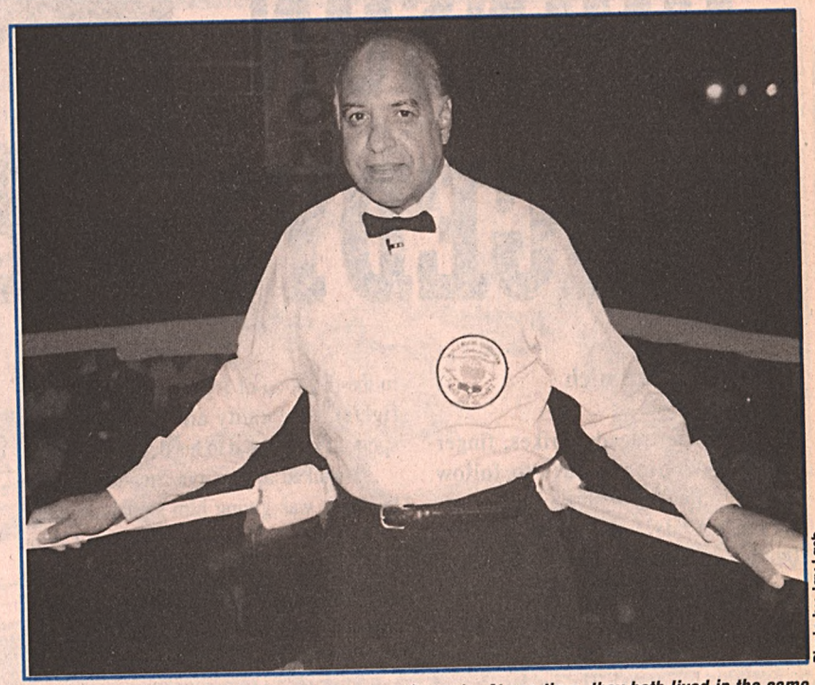


Photo by Jay Lash

World-class referee Joe Cortez is a protege of Ortega's. At one time, they both lived in the same New York City neighborhood, where Ortega first noticed Cortez jumping from roof to roof.

IS ANYONE REALLY TO BLAME FOR THE STEPHAN JOHNSON TRAGEDY?

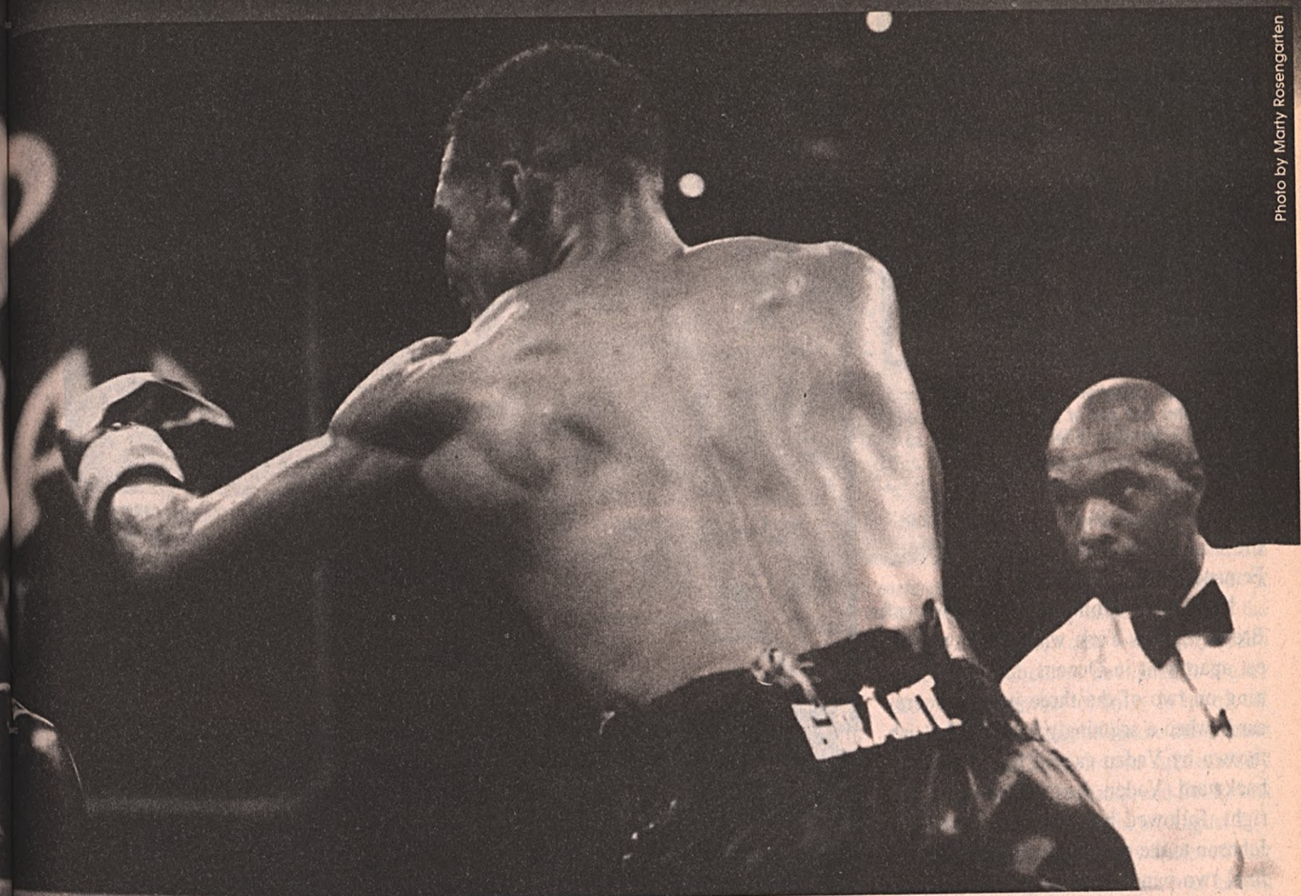


Photo by Marty Rosengarten

After being staggered and dropped by relatively harmless-looking punches in the 10th round of the Vaden fight, Johnson was rushed to the hospital on a stretcher (inset). He lapsed into a coma and died 15 days later.

Photo by Teddy Blackburn

By Robert Mladinich

Where tragedy strikes, finger-pointing is sure to follow. Stephan Johnson died of cardiac arrest 15 days after collapsing in the 10th round of a bout for the vacant USBA junior middleweight title, and the accusations, which were flying almost as soon as he hit the canvas, increased in volume the moment his life ended. The saddest part of it all is that one of those fingers must turn in the direction of Johnson himself, whose fighter's mentality and passion for his sport ultimately led to his demise.

"I walked away from Stephan because his body was giving him signals to quit," said former lightweight champion Carlos Ortiz, who trained Johnson for several bouts until about four years ago. "I pleaded with him to give it up, to say goodbye. But you can only lead a horse to the water, you can't make him drink. First he had a detached retina, and no amount of money is worth losing your sight over. Sometimes he would get hit with right hands and just freeze. I wanted him to listen to the signals, but he had a dream. And that dream cost him his life."

The 31-year-old Johnson never regained consciousness after toppling to the canvas in his November 20 bout with former IBF champion Paul Vaden. The two met on the undercard of the Michael Grant-Andrew Golota heavyweight bout at the Trump Taj Mahal, and the winner was

Photo by Teddy Blackburn

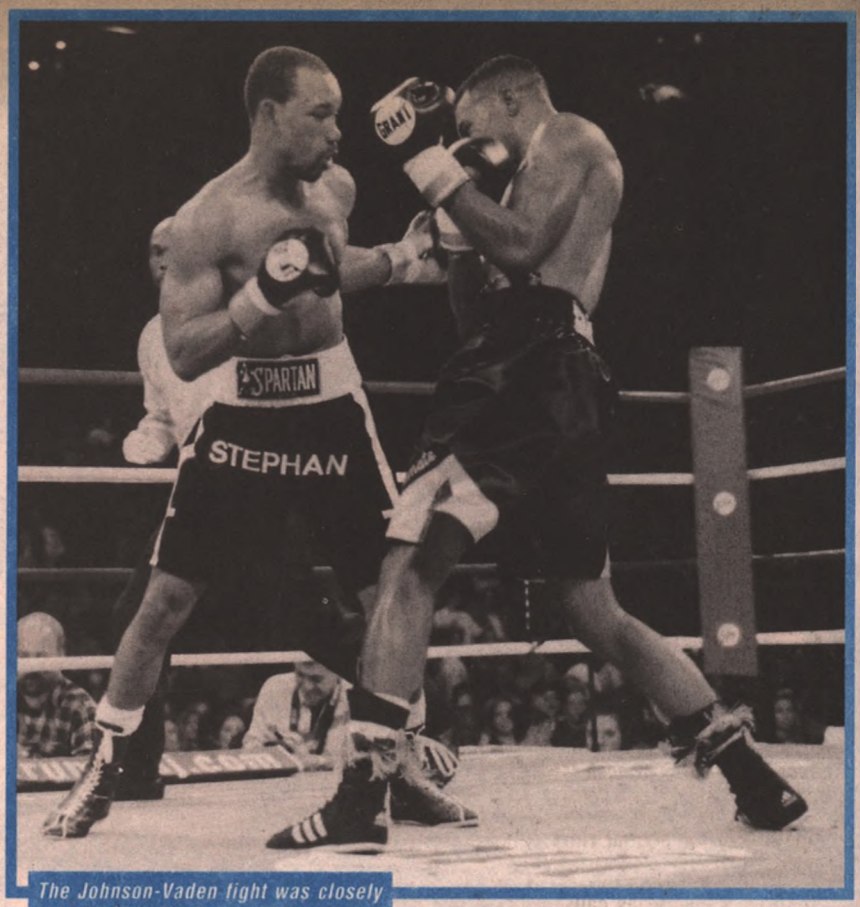
Ira Johnson, Stephan's mother, holds up a photo of her late son at a press conference in Brooklyn a few days after his death. Ira said she had been trying to get Stephan to quit boxing since he was in high school.

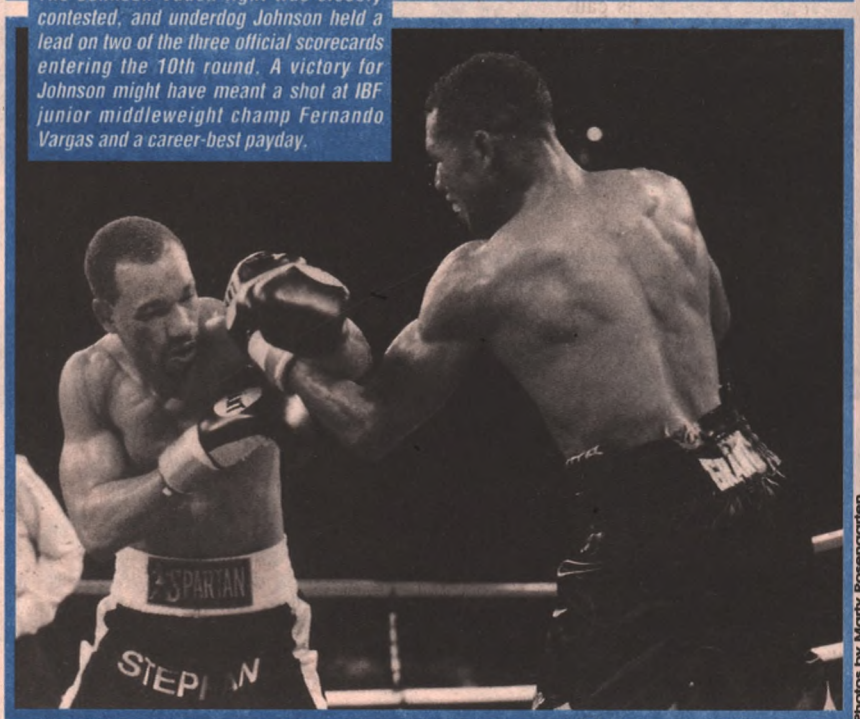
expected to land on the short list of possible challengers for world champions Fernando Vargas and David Reid.

Ironically, Johnson, a native of Brooklyn, New York, who lived in a modest apartment in Queens, had been winning on two of the three judges' scorecards when a seemingly harmless left jab thrown by Vaden caused him to stagger backward. Vaden then landed a grazing right, followed by a left hand that sent Johnson to the canvas. It appeared that the final two punches were not even necessary, as Johnson was teetering on the brink of a knockdown after the very first punch. He was immediately taken out on a stretcher and brought to the Atlantic City Medical Center, where he was diagnosed with a subdural hematoma, an accumulation of blood between the brain and the skull. For the last two weeks of his life, he lay in a coma, oblivious to the contingent of family and friends who kept a steady vigil at his bedside.

"I still can't eat or sleep. All I keep thinking about is Stephan going out on a stretcher, then seeing him in the casket at the wake," said Kenneth Woods, who served as Johnson's manager and trainer since January '98. "Stephan had so much natural talent and could have been such a great boxer, but all he wanted to do was slug. I tried everything to get him to work on defense, which he would do in the gym. But as soon as the bell rang in a real fight, he would start slugging."

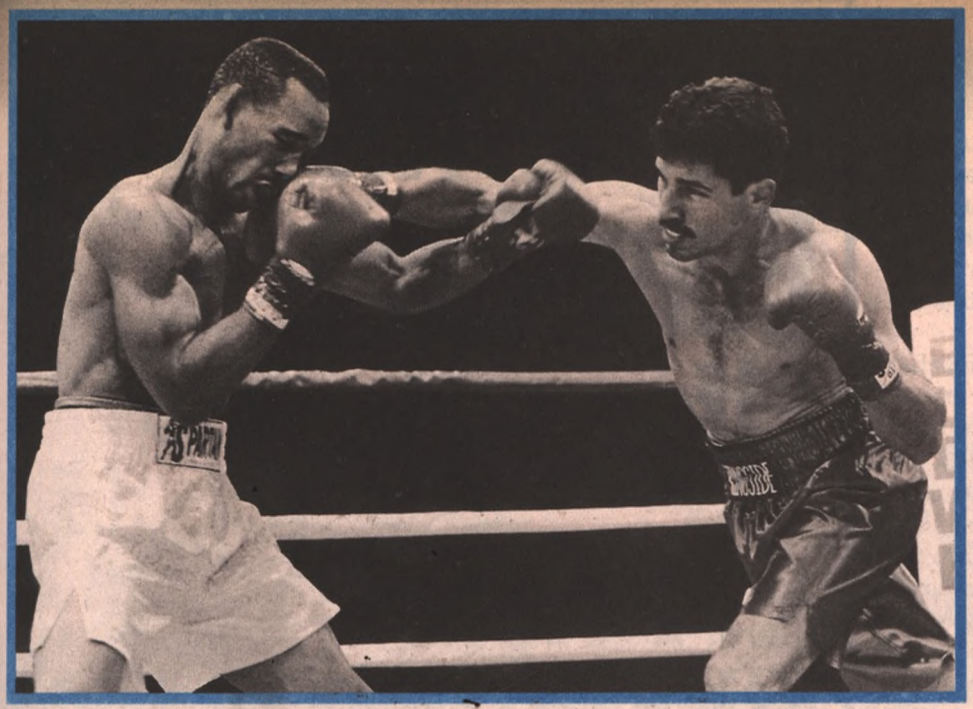
Johnson was an honest workman whose herculean work ethic was not quite enough to take him beyond the point of being a quintessential journeyman. Chasing the dream of at least fighting for a world title since turning pro in 1987, he had stopped future junior middleweight champion Vincent Pettway in six rounds in '90, and also beat such respected contenders as Sam Garr, Anthony Jones, and Willy Wise. He was stopped in eight rounds by Roy Jones in '89 in just the second fight of the future three-division world champion's career, and also wound up on the losing end of bouts with Wilfredo Rivera and Kevin





The Johnson-Vaden fight was closely contested, and underdog Johnson held a lead on two of the three official scorecards entering the 10th round. A victory for Johnson might have meant a shot at IBF junior middleweight champ Fernando Vargas and a career-best payday.

Photos by Marty Rosengarten



Johnson absorbs a hard right to the face en route to dropping a 12-round decision to welterweight contender Wilfredo Rivera in '93. Though somewhat of a journeyman, Johnson still had his share of wins over noteworthy opponents, such as Vincent Pettway, Anthony Jones, and Willy Wise.

Pompey. Johnson's final ring ledger was 27-9-1 (18).

Johnson's death has caused the usual legion of boxing abolitionists to beat the drums extra loudly for the banishment of the sport. Others were lobbying for improved methods of protecting fighters from their own feelings of invincibility. At first glance, it appeared that there was a smoking gun to make their cases stronger than usual, because there was a looming question about why Johnson was even allowed to fight in the first place. Seven months prior to the Vaden debacle, he had collapsed in Toronto during a fight he was winning against Fitz Vanderpool. The bout took place on April 14 at the Royal York Hotel before an upscale, black-tie crowd of 500. Johnson was knocked down in the 11th round by the light-hitting Vanderpool, but managed to get up and find his way to his stool. It was quickly apparent, however, that something was seriously wrong.

"It was like watching a runner cross the finish line and collapse," said Ken Tayashi, the chairman of the Ontario Athletic Commission, who was at ringside and immediately called for an ambulance. "Vanderpool was not a knockout puncher, but he knocked Johnson down. Johnson got up, sat on his stool, and the referee stopped the fight. At that point Johnson could not get up."

"I was scared to death," insisted Woods, who got into an argument with Tayashi for not letting him bring Johnson to the hospital himself when the ambulance took nearly a half-hour to arrive. "Stephan was in and out while we were waiting for the ambulance. All the time, Stephan was sitting up, but he was out of it, completely out of it."

Johnson was given a CATscan at the local hospital and released several hours later. "The doctor said the CATscan showed everything was okay," said Woods. "I was standing right next to Stephan when the doctor said that."

Following standard procedures in Ontario, Tayashi suspended Johnson for at least 60 days and mandated that he receive another CATscan, EEG, and a psychometric neurological examination before being allowed to fight again in the province. A psychometric examination requires an interview with a psychologist, and consists of a series of puzzles and questions to determine any diminished cognitive skills or motor skill degeneration. Tayashi also reported the results of the fight, as well as the suspension and the requirements for reinstatement, to Fight Fax, the New Jersey-based repository for information related to boxers' records, suspensions, and disciplinary proceedings.

As standard operating procedure, Fight Fax is contracted by the Association of Boxing Commissions (ABC), the federal overseer of the sport, to collate all boxing result data. Under recently enacted federal legislation, every boxer who fights in the United States is required to have a federal identification number, and state commissions must report all results within three days. The list is updated twice a week, and is always accessible free of charge on the Internet. It is generally assumed that all the commissions will honor each other's suspensions, but there is a gray area when another country is involved. South Carolina chose to ignore the Ontario suspension after Johnson successfully completed its requirements, and Dr. Robert Ashton cleared him to fight on August 7.

Although Woods firmly believed that Johnson's collapse in Toronto was caused by heat exhaustion and dehydration, brought on by having to make the contract-

(Continued on page 75)

Photo by Teddy Blackburn

Johnson's fiancee, Bonnie Smith, speaks at the Gleason's Gym press conference. Smith's 14-year-old son, an amateur boxer, was Johnson's biggest fan.

By Pete Ehrmann

Living The Purr-Fect Life

KITTEN HAYWARD Still Has The Smell Of Success

Lawyers call him "Mr. Esquire" because he's the sharpest dresser at the Philadelphia courthouse. The monogram on all of his custom-made shirts say "Mr. Kitten" because, says the one-time model, "I earned the name." Pop music diva Diana Ross calls him "Kitty," and you can ask him yourself about that one.

Nobody calls Stanley Cornelius Hayward "champ," but the former top welterweight, junior middleweight, and middleweight contender wastes no time wringing his hands over it. He's too busy dressing right, looking good, attending functions, schmoozing with show business pals and political cronies like Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell and Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge, and remaining at age 60, in his words, "a living legend" in the City of Brotherly Love.

In fact, someday Hayward may address that particular deficiency on his resume in an autobiography he intends to call *I Did Not Want To Become Champ*. It will tell how, as the number-one contender in three separate weight classes in the 1960s, Hayward "lived next door to the champs," from which vantage point he witnessed close-up the dismal fate of so many who wore the crown.

"I saw a lot," said Hayward. "All at once this champ falls down. He's not the same. He don't talk and walk the same. He's slurring a little bit, in a fog. I see another champ, and he's lost his money. When I see all that, I don't know if I want to become a champ. I might be in a fog, too."

Indeed, "I'm glad I didn't become champion," he declares, fairly shuddering at his narrow escape from such a gruesome fate. "I'm just thanking God He brought me through all that, and I'm still okay."

And even better now than when he started out in the ring.

"I used to stutter, and all at once I started fighting, and they hit me, and I stopped stuttering," claimed Hayward. "I went in stuttering and came out not stuttering, and it usually goes the other way around. I tell people who stutter: Go to a boxing gym."

It wasn't his speech impediment that led Hayward to the Philadelphia Boys Club in the late-'50s. He wanted to play basketball, his favorite sport, but his friends were gathered around a boxing ring watching local middleweight Marvin "Candy" McFarland work out. McFarland was a nationally known boxer then, but Hayward wasn't impressed.

"That guy can't fight," he told his buddies loud enough for McFarland's father, Daniel, to hear. The senior McFarland promptly invited Hayward to get between the ropes with his son, and a round or two later, Hayward exited with a black eye.

"I'll see what he can do outside of the ring," Hayward told his friends, stationing himself by the front door with a large rock with which he intended to do to McFarland's head what he'd been unable to do with his fists.

The "Kitten" then and now: Hayward as he looked as a top contender in the 1960s (left), and today as an assistant to Philadelphia Common Pleas Judge Rayford A. Means (right). The dapper ex-fighter is widely considered the best dressed man in the Philadelphia court system.

Photo by Frank Vilucci

Hayward wings a right at Jose Stable, the second-ranked welterweight contender, during their 1963 bout at Madison Square Garden. It was the Philadelphian's first scheduled 10-rounder, and he lost a close decision.

The McFarlands spotted him as they exited and challenged Hayward, in front of his pals, to return to the gym.

"I came back, and he blackened my other eye," recalled Hayward, who waited outside for his tormentor with a stick after that session.

Persuaded to keep trying inside the ring, within a few weeks, "I got my

Hayward chats with ex-boxer Dan Bucceroni and opponent Dick Turner at a prefight physical exam. Hayward's decision win over Turner earned him general recognition as Philadelphia's top welterweight.

wouldn't have been true of the one Hayward traded it for when Katz' girlfriend said Hayward's "gentle and playful" nature reminded her of a kitten. "I like that name," said Hayward, and thus, as the saying went, Katz got his Kitten.

The nickname was a trifle misleading. "I'm playful," said Hayward, "but when I fought, I fought like a tiger. They used to say, 'Never get a hot dog when Kitten comes on. Bring your lunch and eat it in your seat, because you never know when somebody'll get knocked out.'"

Hayward was, in short, a typical Philadelphia fighter of that era, a fearless, rugged type, bred in the gyms where sparring sessions were usually as vicious and cutthroat as actual bouts.

"Philadelphia had all these warrior gyms," Hayward said. "You'd box with Liston, Sugar Hart, Charley Scott. Those guys were fighters, and you didn't hold back nothing. We used to war. If you could fight in the gym and have wars, you didn't fear nobody."

"The kids get mad at me for saying it,

revenge," Hayward said. "I really made McFarland bleed." Then, his mission finally accomplished, Hayward left the gym for good because "I didn't want to be no fighter." That lasted until Daniel McFarland tracked him down and pointed out that good fighters made $5,000 for a bout.

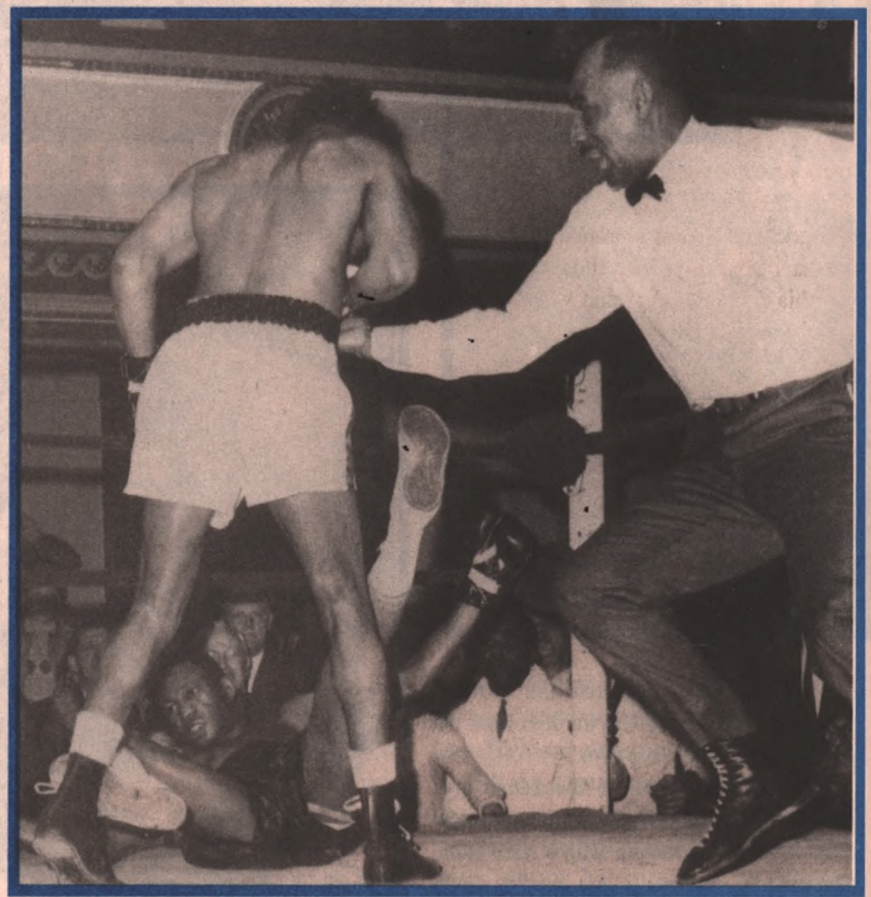
"Don't say no more," Hayward told him. "I'll be in tomorrow."

After just one amateur fight, Hayward turned pro on June 10, 1959, winning a four-round decision over Tom Holmes in Scranton. He got paid $40, and upon inquiring after the other $4,960, he was informed, "You got a lot of climbing to do."

"It was a long ride home," Hayward remembered. "I kept asking myself, 'Do I want to be a fighter?' But once you're in the game, you like it, especially when you're young."

George Katz eventually became Hayward's manager. Katz had managed Gil Turner, Philadelphia's premier welterweight warrior of the '50s, and also briefly had a heavyweight whose surly public demeanor, Hayward says, belied the fact that Sonny Liston was like "a big baby who liked to clown."

Hayward's first nickname—"Stonewall"—would have fit Liston well, but that



The victory that cemented Hayward's status as a top contender was an up-from-the-floor, fourth-round TKO of Curtis Cokes in 1964. Cokes went on to become world welterweight champion two years later.

No hard feelings: After losing to Gypsy Joe Harris, Hayward parted company with manager George Katz (far left) and signed on with former heavyweight contender Bucceroni (far right). Kitten also got a new trainer in Adolph Ritacco (wearing a plaid sports jacket).

but they don't make 'em like that no more," said Al Mitchell, who had a front row seat for those gym wars, and now manages and trains David Reid, Philadelphia's latest sensation. "There will never be fighters like those old Philadelphia fighters again, and when you say that, you put Kitten Hayward in there, too."

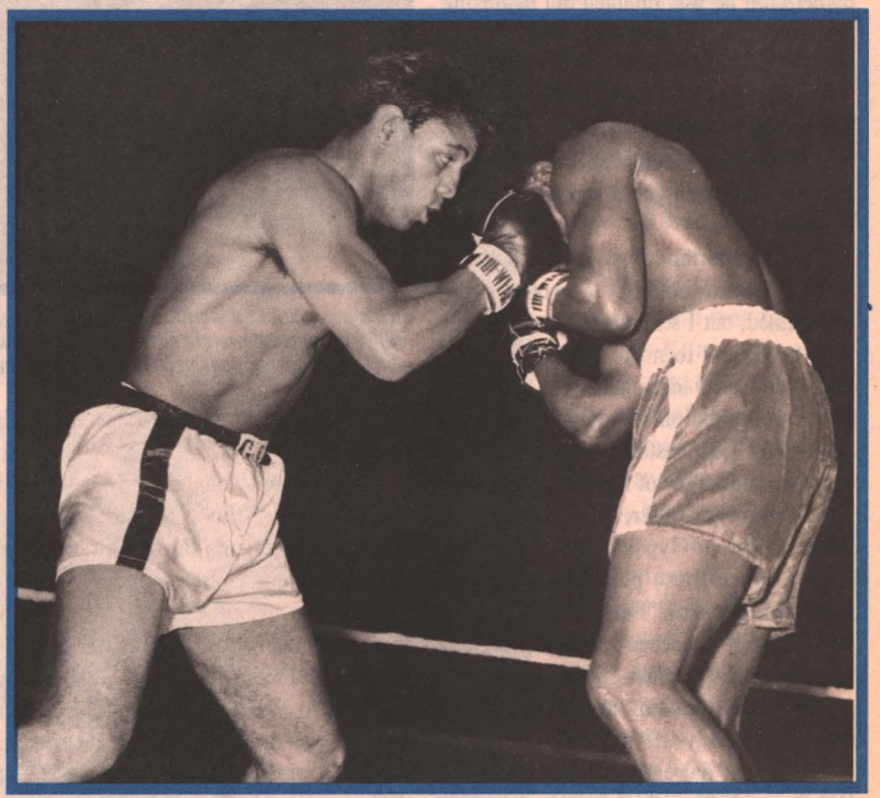
Hayward was 16-1-1 (7) when he fought number-two ranked welterweight Jose Stable at Madison Square Garden on August 3, 1963. It was the Philadelphia boxer's first scheduled 10-rounder, but *The New York Times* noted that Hayward "has floored 14 opponents with his fast, straight blows from an upright style," and that he had knocked out Charley Scott, whom Stable had decisioned in his last fight, in a gym session the week before.

Stable won the decision, but in his next two bouts, Hayward cemented his claim to supremacy among Philadelphia's top welterweights by bumping off Percy Manning and Dick Turner. Next, in the fight Hayward says "put me on the map," Curtis Cokes put him on the deck for the first time in his career in their May 1, 1964, match at the Blue Horizon. But Hayward got up from the second-round knockdown and became the first (and ultimately one of only two) to stop the future welterweight champion, by putting Cokes down twice in the fourth round.

Garden matchmaker Teddy Brenner called Hayward the best welterweight in the world. The other contenders wouldn't call him at all, and it was 13 months before Hayward fought again, knocking out Vince Shomo. Inactivity in the ring and too much activity outside of it were twin themes throughout Hayward's career.

"I was a damned good fighter," Hayward said, "but you have to lead a good, clean life. And I didn't want a good, clean life. I was a ladies' man. You had to take me away and lock me up before a fight. If you kept me in the city, I'd be in the gym, punching the bag, and a pretty girl would come in and say, 'Hi, Kitten!' I'd tell her, "Wait for me in the car.'"

Right before he fought local rival Bennie Briscoe (a Philly legend in his own right) on December 6, 1965, to decide "who's the top dog in the city," Hayward had a reunion with a visiting girlfriend that



One of Hayward's biggest wins came in 1968 when he outpointed future Hall of Famer Emile Griffith at the Philadelphia Spectrum. Kitten claims he would have knocked out Griffith if he hadn't eased up after hurting the former welter and middleweight champ.

kept him out of the gym for over a week. Katz wanted a postponement, but Kitten saw no need for it, which he came to regret halfway through the 10-round bout.

"I hit Mr. Bennie Briscoe with so many punches in five rounds, I ran out of gas," recalled Hayward. "Then I said to myself, 'Now that I'm exhausted, what do I do?' I fought the rest of the fight off the ropes. Of course, I went to hospital."

Awarded a split decision, Hayward began talking out of his head in the dressing room, and was treated for symptoms of a concussion.

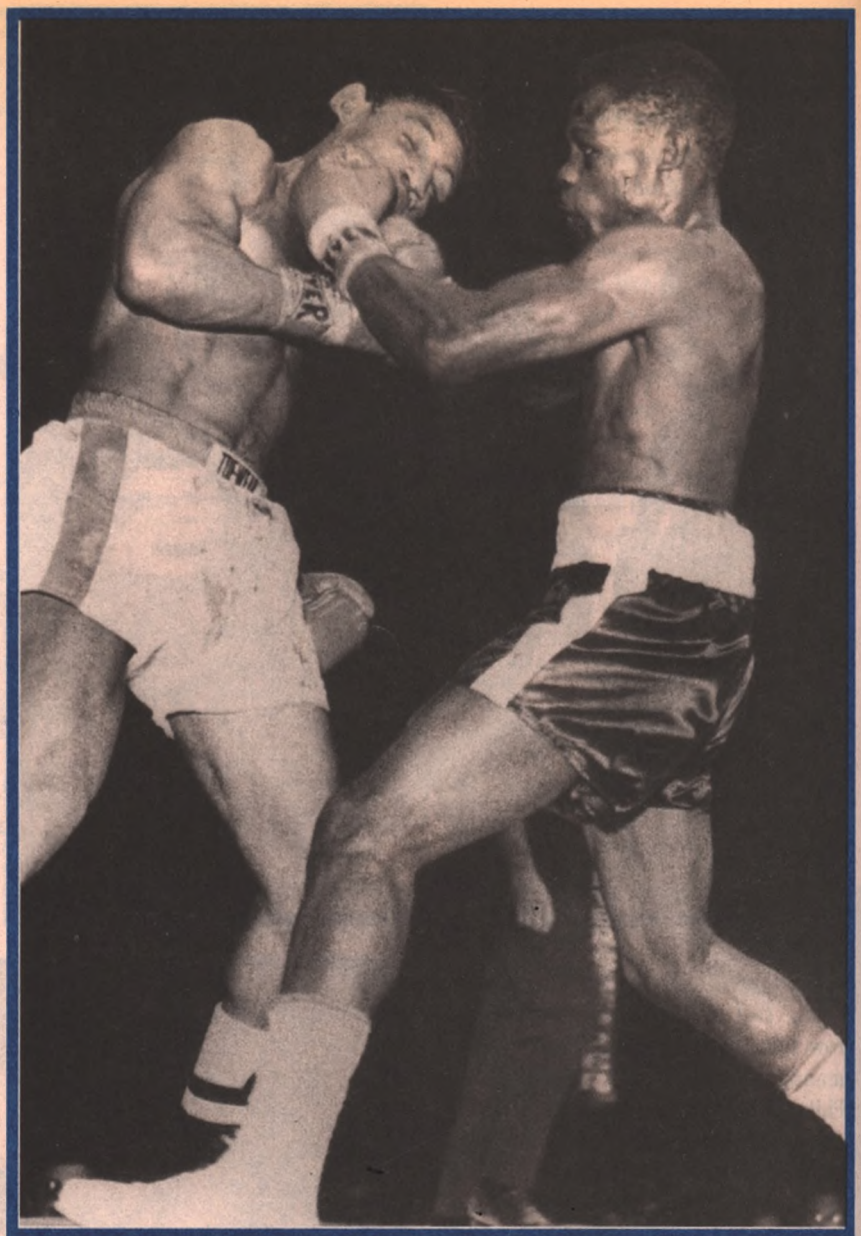
The following spring, Emile Griffith won the middleweight title and abdicated the 147-pound throne he'd occupied for several years. Cokes picked up the vacant title, and there was supposed to be a rematch with Hayward. But Kitten, off again for 10 months, insisted on a tuneup match, and manager Katz made what Hayward calls his "worst mistake," which ultimately ended their relationship. Instead of a journeyman or soft-touch, Katz put Hayward in with another Philadelphia legend-in-the-making called Gypsy Joe Harris, a bald-headed, gnome-like street prodigy who was the city's brightest ring comet until he was tumbled out of boxing after somebody noticed he was blind in one eye.

"I was rusty and couldn't hit a moving target," said Hayward. "Harris was sort of like Prince Naseem Hamed. He'd give you a target, and when you'd shoot for it, he's not there."

Harris' unorthodox style and Kitten's attitude toward training ("I went to camp and trained, but I still messed around a little") combined to make Hayward a seventh-round TKO loser. With that, the Katz-Kitten combination was kaput. Hayward came away with custody of the nickname, and also a new style of fighting.

"As you get older, you get smarter. When I lost to Gypsy Joe, I realized I couldn't take those punches anymore," explained Hayward. "I didn't start to run in the ring, but I learned to bend a certain way and let the punches go over my head."

He was also pulling in his claws a bit, and Hayward says he will go to his grave insisting that the earlier, more ferocious Kitten would have knocked out Griffith instead of just winning a decision over the then-former middleweight champion when they fought at the Philadelphia Spectrum on October 29, 1968.



In his only shot at a world title, Hayward lost a 15-round decision to Freddie Little for the vacant WBA junior middleweight championship. Hayward claims the cut he suffered in the second round and Little's counterpunching style led to his downfall.

"When I was younger, if I hit you, I'd finish you off," Hayward said. "I'd have taken Griffith apart. But I got older, and when I hurt him, I eased off."

The win brought Hayward his only world title shot. But the March 17, 1969, match with Freddie Little in Las Vegas for the vacant WBA junior middleweight crown, "was the dullest fight I ever had in my life," and Hayward lost a 15-round decision.

"Hey, I just wasn't in the fight," said Hayward, who was inhibited by a cut over his left eye that was incurred in the second round. "The more work you put out, the more you bleed. Little laid back and waited, a counterpuncher, and I'm more of a counterpuncher, and when you get two of those, it's gonna be a dull fight."

Two months later at Madison Square Garden, Griffith opened the same cut and won a 12-round rematch and the right to fight Nino Benvenuti again for the middleweight title. Hayward's days as a top contender were over, but not his catting around. Headquartered in Paris during the winter of '70, he had four fights with indifferent results. But heeding his mother's

advise to "choose your friends well or wind up behind the eight-ball," he hobnobbed with movie stars Yul Brunner, Omar Sharif, and Jean-Paul Belmondo, who apparently got as much out of their relationships with Kitten as the other way around.

"They were boxing fans," Hayward said. "They liked to be around talented boxers."

Branching out into their world, Hayward got himself a small part in a Western movie filmed in Europe.

"I got shot up real fast, and that was my scene," said Hayward.

Upon his return to America, Hayward did some modeling and auditioning in California, until his friend Muhammad Ali said, "Kitten, what are you doing in them suits? Your work is fighting." So Hayward fought a rising Philadelphia star named Eugene "Cyclone" Hart and lasted just one round, which wasn't too surprising since Kitten spent most of his time at the racetrack and the Latin Casino nightclub across the Delaware River in Camden, New Jersey. Hayward even kicked his trainer out of their hotel room, telling him, "I like to walk around nude, and I don't want you looking at me." In fact, he didn't want the trainer running into the women Kitten preferred being seen by in the nude.

Hayward received $12,000 for the Hart fight, "played the horses, and wound up looking for another fight." He finally quit in '75, finishing with a record of 32-12-4 (17).

While he was still fighting, Hayward also worked as a salesman for Ballantine Beer, which came easier to him than throwing the trademark Philadelphia left hook.

"You know how you sell beer, don't you?" he asked. "You go to beer gardens and meet ladies and you spend expense money."

Nineteen years ago, a lawyer friend told him, "With your personality, you should be in the court system." Ever since, Hayward has worked in the Common Plea Court, and is currently an aide to Judge Rayford Means.

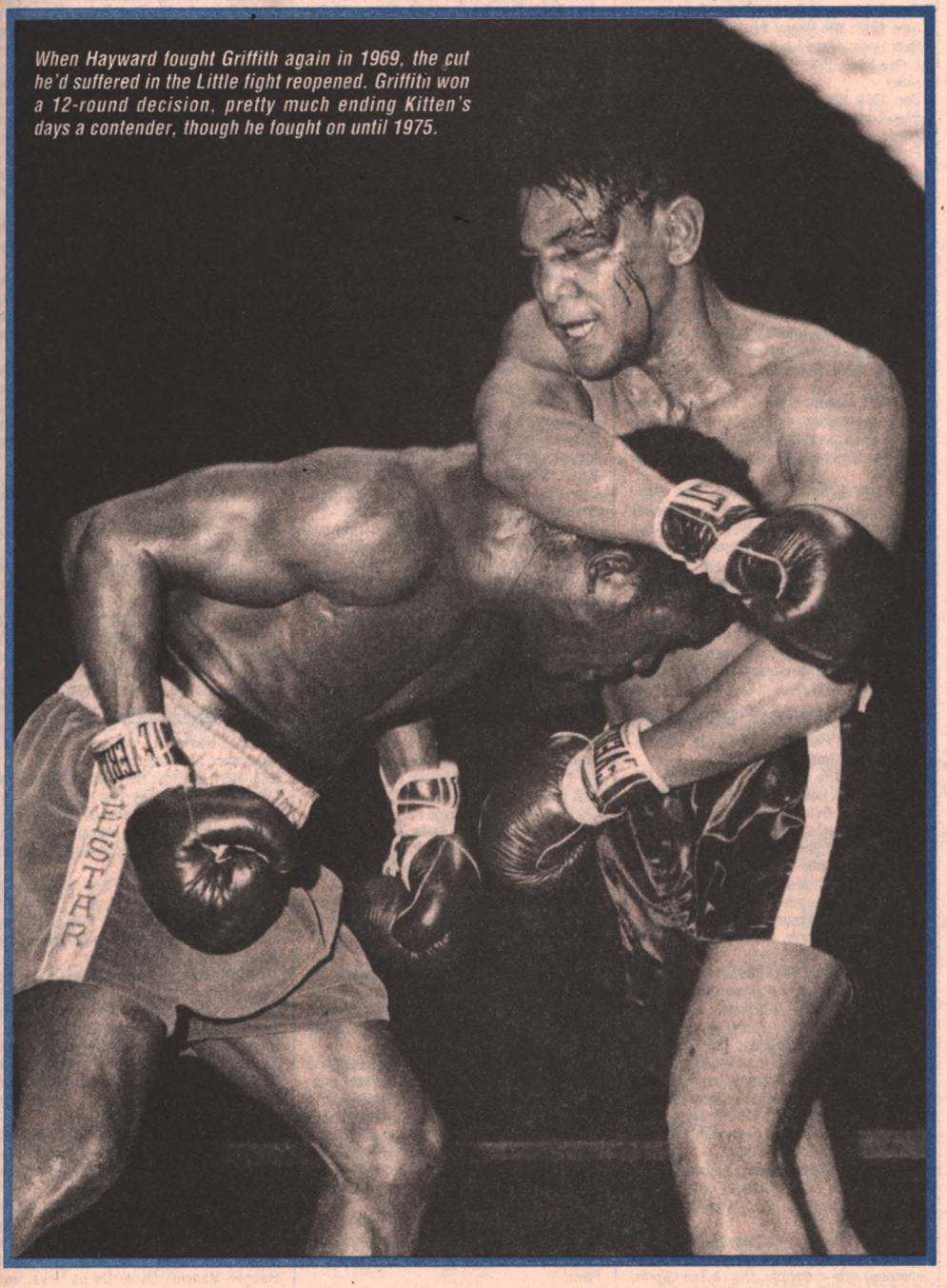
Today, Hayward does more roadwork and working out than he did as a boxer, which has the desired effect, along with his sharp threads and facile tongue, of provoking incredulity in strangers when they find out he used to be a fighter. Even his old comrades-in-arms tell him, "Kitten, you sure look good."

"I hate to tell 'em, 'You sure look bad,'" Hayward said.

Hayward is determined that no one will ever think that about the Kitten who came through what he calls the "dog-eat-dog" world of boxing unscathed, and who clearly is his own catnip.

"You know how boxers die and fade away," Hayward said. "I'm not fading away. I still want to be in the limelight. I'm still looking good, talking good, dressing good, and smelling good. All that means a lot in life." ■

Pete Ehrmann, a freelance writer based in West Allis, Wisconsin, is a regular contributor to this magazine.



When Hayward fought Griffith again in 1969, the cut he'd suffered in the Little fight reopened. Griffith won a 12-round decision, pretty much ending Kitten's days a contender, though he fought on until 1975.

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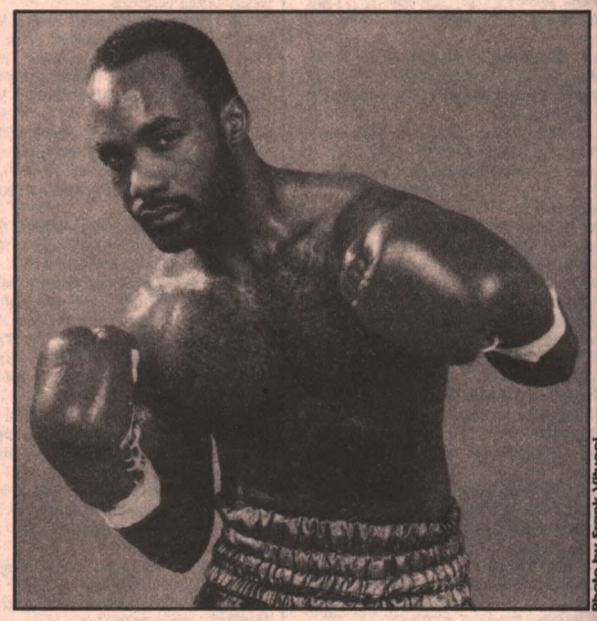

Photo by Frank Vitucci

The magic gloves looked anything but magical. They were two beat-up, old pieces of leather that the whole block shared. If young Calvin Davis wanted to use them, sometimes he would have to go door-to-door looking for them. But they were worth any inconvenience. To Davis, the mitts were a doorway that gave him the chance to be somebody and to dream of going to places other than the hardcore North Philadelphia area in which he lived.

If you wanted to be accepted by your peers in North Philly in the 1980s, you had to box. Boxing was a way of life, like playing hockey in Canada, or playing basketball in New York City. Davis wanted to belong, so he put his little hands in these sweaty gloves and boxed. Davis would always imagine he was Sugar Ray Leonard, and anyone he fought was automatically Tommy Hearns. Today, Davis is turning his dreams into a reality.

The 5'5" Davis is emerging as someone to watch in the junior lightweight class. He has forged a 17-0 (8) record, and is currently ranked number 14 by the IBF. His last three fights were scheduled 10-rounders, but he went the distance in just one of them. This is a crucial time for Davis; 2000 is the year he wants to make his mark and jump to the championship level.

The 30-year-old Davis sometimes reminisces about how he got started, and the famous Philadelphia fighters he came across in his youth, fighters such as local folk hero Bennie Briscoe and former IBF lightweight champion Charlie "Choo Choo" Brown. Today, Davis is inspired by modern-day North Philly warriors David Reid and Bernard Hopkins, both of whom have become world champions since Davis turned pro in '94.

"Boxing was something to do," said Davis of his youthful involvement in the sport. "If you didn't box, you were seen as a coward. If you couldn't box, you were picked on. There was always someone forcing it. If you didn't get in the ring, you had problems growing up in my neighborhood. Boxing was always something I wanted to do. That time definitely had an impression on me. Just growing up in Philly, I wanted to get out of school, so I could get to the gym. There was always a respect there, like people today are about basketball stars in high

(Continued on page 78)

PRO RECORD

1994		
Oct. 11	George Ortiz, Philadelphia	KO 2
Dec. 3	Travis Baxter, Upper Darby, PA	KO 1
1995		
Jan. 27	Anthony Hardy, Philadelphia	W 4
Feb. 10	Robert Scott, Philadelphia	W 4
1996		
July 9	Paul Terrell, Philadelphia	KO 1
Aug. 22	Adrian Taylor, Philadelphia	KO 1
Dec. 2	Robert Scott, Philadelphia	W 6
1997		
March 3	Jose Gonzales, Philadelphia	W 6
April 11	Jamie Ayers, Philadelphia	W 4
Nov. 28	Ali Muhammad, Philadelphia	W 6
1998		
March 13	Ed Butts, Reading, PA	KO 3
May 15	Terry Smith, Philadelphia	KO 2
June 12	Manuel Santiago, Wilmington, DE	W 6
Sept. 15	Fidelio Morel, Wilmington	W 6
Dec. 17	Troy Fletcher, Philadelphia	KO 5
1999		
July 2	Felix Marti, Philadelphia	KO 1
Nov. 19	Joseph Charles, Philadelphia	W 10

FIGHTS	WON	LOST	DREW	KOs
17	17	0	0	8

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- Marciano's KOs Walcott
- Robinson slugs Gavilan
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CAMERA CLICKS

Photo by Ray Bailey

Who's the Fighter of the Decade for the 1990s? According to the American Association for the Improvement of Boxing, it's three-division world champion Roy Jones, who was presented with the award by AAIB Chairman Stephen Acunto in December.

Photo by Mike Greenhill

A classic contrast of styles: Zab Judah, who is of the hit-and-don't-get-hit school of thought, poses with Arturo Gatti, who is of the get-hit-until-you're-a-bloody-swollen-mess mindset. Gatti and Judah are both junior welterweights, and they're both promoted by Main Events. Hmmm ...

Photo by Teddy Blackburn

"Why didn't you tell me rounds nine through 12 were actually going to count?!" Oscar De La Hoya's corner gave him an earful of bad advice in his fight with Felix Trinidad, and here, De La Hoya seems to be giving assistant trainer Gil Clancy an earful in return.

Photo by Teddy Blackburn

Apparently Laila Ali's routine where she scowls over a fallen opponent like her father did in his rematch with Sonny Liston has extended beyond her pro debut. Here, the undefeated super middleweight does her thing against Nicolyn Armstrong.

Photo by Marty Rosengarten

Ladies and gentlemen, the newest cast members of A Chorus Line, *Roy Jones and David Telesco! The feeling of most experts going into Jones and Telesco's January 15 fight was that Telesco would probably have a much better time dancing with the light heavyweight champ than trading punches with him.*

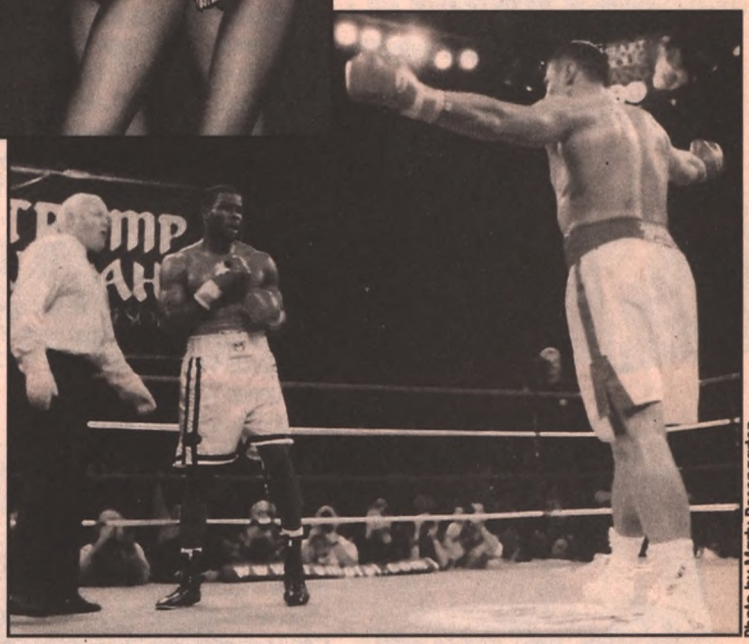

Photo by Marty Rosengarten

"The Foul Pole" was crying foul himself after Michael Grant got away with numerous low blows in his November meeting with Andrew Golota. Referee Randy Neumann did eventually take a point from Grant, but that became immaterial when Golota became "The Fowl Pole" in the 10th round, chickening out when the going got rough.

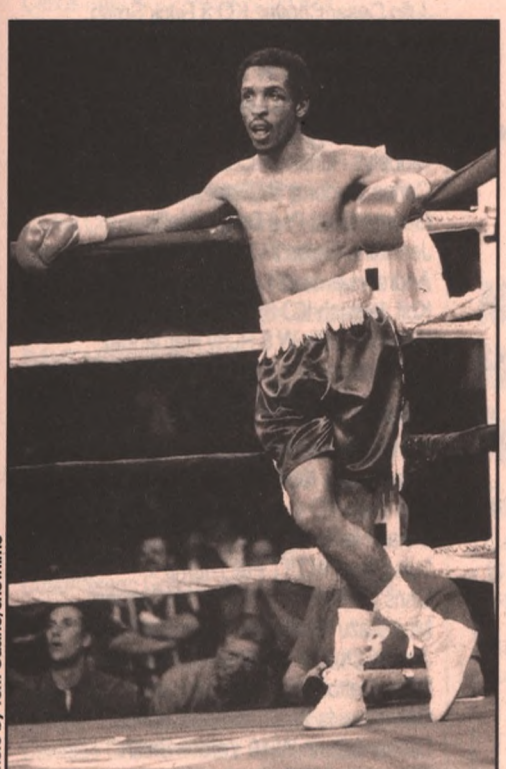

Photo by Tom Casino/Showtime

Nobody can ever tell junior welterweight hotshot Randall Bailey he isn't relaxed enough in the ring. Bailey crossed his legs and contemplated the meaning of life while waiting for opponent Hector Lopez to rise from a knockdown in their December '99 battle.

NOSTALGIA CORNER

The tale of the tape was not very friendly to former heavyweight contender Chuck Wepner in his 1976 meeting with pro wrestler Andre the Giant, whose fist was approximately the size of Wepner's head. Wepner couldn't stack up to Andre in the nickname department either; would you rather be known as "The Eighth Wonder Of The World" or "The Bayonne Bleeder"?

SUMMARY

HEAVYWEIGHTS

Vitaly Klitschko KO 9 Obed Sullivan
Wladimir Klitschko KO 2 Lajos Eros
John Ruiz KO 2 Thomas Williams
Ray Mercer KO 1 Jim Haynes
Oliver McCall KO 1 Will Hinton
Vaughn Bean W Disq. 6 Danny Wofford
Brian Nielsen KO 3 Frank Wood
Jimmy Thunder KO 2 Eli Dixon
Larry Donald KO 2 Jeff Lally
Wolfgramm W 10 Calvin Lampkin
Ahmad Abdin KO 1 Rodney McSwane
Keith McKnight W 10 Everett Martin
Danny Williams W 12 Harry Senior
Peter McNeeley KO 1 Jeff Jones
Jeff Pegues KO 7 Joe Hipp
Derek Banks W 10 Sherman Williams
Fernely Feliz KO 2 Don Normand
Alex Garcia W 8 Ron McCarthy
Nate Jones W 8 Sedreck Fields
Robert Davis KO 5 Tom Glesby
Joe Mesi KO 1 Gary Winmon
Butterbean W 4 Tim Ray

CRUISERWEIGHTS

Juan Carlos Gomez KO 9 Napoleon Tagoe
(Retains WBC Title)
Marcelo Dominguez KO 3 Ken Husley
Carl Thompson KO 12 Terry Dunstan
Imamu Mayfield D 12 Louis Azille
Torsten May W 12 Alexei Iliin
Ole Klemetsen KO 4 Robert Koon
Glenn Kelly KO 6 Laverne Clark

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS

Reggie Johnson W 10 Earl Butler
Eric Harding KO 7 Leon Gray
Darren Corbett W 12 Neil Simpson
Dario Matteoni KO 2 Reginaldo Dos Santos
Clinton Woods KO 4 Terry Ford
Thomas Ulrich KO 2 Warren Moore

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Byron Mitchell D 12 Bruno Girard
(Retains WBA Title)
Mads Larsen KO 6 Omar Gonzalez
Glenn Catley KO 12 Eric Lucas
Tony Ayala KO 8 Tony Menefee
Guillermo Jones W 6 Jaffa Ballogou
James Coker W 10 Urbano Gurrola
Silvio Branco W 6 Marco Antonio Duarte
Laila Ali KO 2 Nicolyn Armstrong

MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Bernard Hopkins W 12 Antwun Echols
(Retains IBF Title)
Hassine Cherifi KO 4 Mohamed Boualleg
Mpush Makambi KO 4 Steve Foster
Stephane Ouellet KO 7 Tyler Hughes
Ron Weaver KO 9 Ron Johnson
Ramon Britez KO 9 Rogerio Cacciatore
Kenny Ellis KO 7 Kenny Lopez
Alain Bonnamie W 8 Greg Johnson
Anthony Stephens W 8 Cirilo Nino
Akira Ohigashi W 10 Sukhyun Yun
Anthony Farnell KO 6 Marino Monteyne

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Fernando Vargas W 12 Winky Wright
(Retains IBF Title)
Francisco Castillejo KO 7 Mikael Rask
(Retains WBC Title)
Bronco McKart KO 3 Jaime Balboa
Oba Carr KO 4 Ramon Baez
Hector Camacho Tech. Draw 3 Jorge Vaca
Ray Oliveira KO 6 Israel Figueroa
Pat Coleman W 10 Jose Rivera
Quirino Garcia KO 3 Victor Maciel
Ross Thompson W 12 Derrick Graham
Tony Badea W 12 Gavin Topp
Hercules Kyvelos KO 3 Alex Lubo
Darren Maciunski W 4 Bruce Corby

WELTERWEIGHTS

Vince Phillips KO 3 Angel Beltre
Julio Cesar Chavez KO 3 Buck Smith
Bolillo Gonzalez KO 5 Jose Cruz
Michele Piccirillo W 12 Frankie Randall
Diobelys Hurtado Tech. Draw 2
Ricardo Mayorga
Diobelys Hurtado KO 3 Dillon Carew
Carlos Baldomir W Disq. 11 Joshua Clottey
George Scott W 6 Delroy Mellis
Jermaine Fields KO 3 Eldon Sneed
Andrew Lewis KO 3 Damone Wright
Kofi Jantuah KO 3 Gerald Reed
Orlando Hollis W 8 Rudy Hernandez
John Molnar D 6 Michael Corleone

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS

Randall Bailey KO 9 Hector Lopez
James Leija KO 5 Wayne Boudreaux
Billy Irwin KO 4 Jose Vida Ramos
Vivian Harris W 10 Gary St. Clair
Luis Perez KO 11 Pat Thorns
Chris Barnett W 12 Glenn McClarnon
Masakazu Satake W 12 Jongkil Kim
Junichi Ono W 10 Masaaki Morooka
Ricky Hatton KO 4 Mark Winters
Calvin Davis W 10 Joseph Charles
Leonard Dorin W 10 Verdell Smith
Oktay Urkal W 8 Nassim Yahiaoui

LIGHTWEIGHTS

Paul Spadafora KO 11 Renato Cornett
(Retains IBF Title)
Cesar Bazan KO 3 Jose Antonio Ocampo
Alejandro Gonzalez KO 3 Mauro Lucero
Saul Duran KO 8 Jose Luis Juarez

Joel Perez KO 10 John Lark
Walter Rodriguez W 12 Eduardo Morales
Bobby Vanzie W 12 Vincent Howard
Michael Ayers KO 10 Tony Miller
Bruno Wartelle W 12 Nanoy Gonzalez
Raul Balbi W 12 Santos Rebolledo
Jose Badillo Tech. Win 5 Israel Flores
Rick Roberts W 10 Takehiro Shimada
Dennis Holbaek KO 2 Luis Guzman

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS
Diego Corrales W 12 John Brown
(Retains IBF Title)
Yong Soo Choi KO 6 Joe Escriber
Acelino Freitas KO 3 Claudio Martinet
Koji Arisawa KO 4 Nobutoshi Hiranaka
Jose Luis Castillo KO 5 Jorge Paez
Dean Pithie W 12 Mzonke Fana
Jorge Barrios KO 6 Joao Pereira
Daniel Alicea KO 9 Hilario Guzman
Michael Gomez KO 11 Oscar Galindo
Robbie Peden W 10 Benito Rodriguez

FEATHERWEIGHTS
Julio Pablo Chacon KO 8 Richard Carrillo
Julio Pablo Chacon KO 8 Wilson Palacios
Juan Carlos Ramirez W 10 Daryl Pinckney
Steve Robinson W 12 Jon Jo Irwin
Mauricio Pastrana W 6 Daryl Pinckney
Carlos Rios W 12 Victor Hugo Paz
Philip Ndou KO 3 Laureano Ramirez
Juan Gerardo Cabrera KO 2
Patricio Carrasco
Patrick Mullings W 12 Eric Odumasi
Marcos Licona KO 3 Efren Torres

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS
Carlos Contreras W 12 Carlos Navarro
Danny Romero KO 1 Ricky Dinkins
Manny Pacquiao KO 2 Reynante Jamili
Mauricio Martinez KO 7 Lupe Gastellum

BANTAMWEIGHTS
Tim Austin KO 1 Bernardo Mendoza
(Retains IBF Title)
Jesper Jensen W 8 Teofilo Manzueta
Gabriel Mira KO 3 Ron Fernaud

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS
Eric Morel W 8 Oscar Arciniega
Cuauhtemoc Gomez W 12 Julio Coronell

FLYWEIGHTS
Rosendo Alvarez KO 2 Arturo Velazquez
Isidro Garcia W 12 Jose Lopez
Melchor Cob Castro W 10 Francisco Garcia
Oswaldo Guerrero KO 2 Felipe Lopez
Mike Trejo KO 4 Eduardo Manzano

STRAWWEIGHTS
Zolani Petelo W 12 Juanito Rubillar
(Retains IBF Title)
Joma Gamboa KO 6 Satoru Abe
Manny Melchor W 12 Ernesto Rubillar
Hiroshi Nakajima W 12 Allan Llanita

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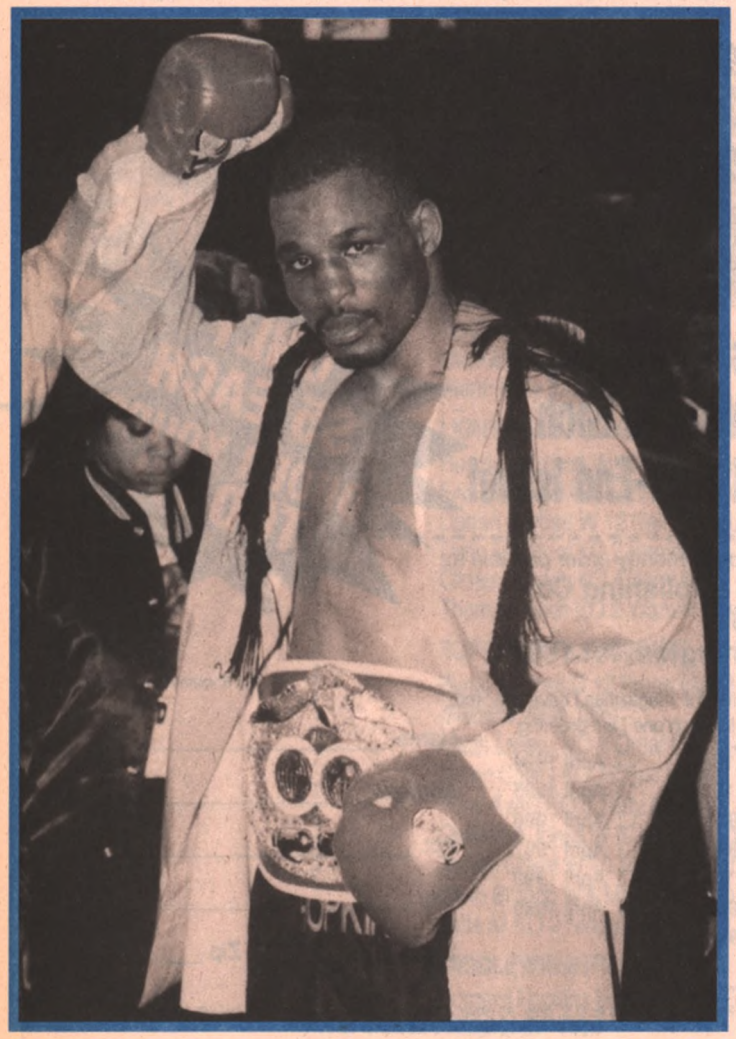
RINGSIDE REPORTS

FIGHTER *of the* MONTH

Antwun Echols can punch. Maybe IBF middleweight champ Hopkins wasn't convinced by seeing Echols knock Brian Barbosa to the floor with a single shot in February '98. Maybe Echols' brutal drubbing of Kevin Tillman two months later didn't impress Hopkins either. Maybe the vicious uppercut that kayoed Urbano Gurrola three months after that didn't give Hopkins any sleepless nights. But about two minutes into his title defense against Echols, Hopkins finally got the message, and it put him flat on his butt. No, it wasn't an official knockdown, because the right hand that landed on "The Executioner's" jaw came while the referee was already stepping in to separate the fighters. But it did wake Hopkins up to the seriousness of the task he was facing, and he responded by showing the incredible versatility that makes him the best 160-pounder in the world.

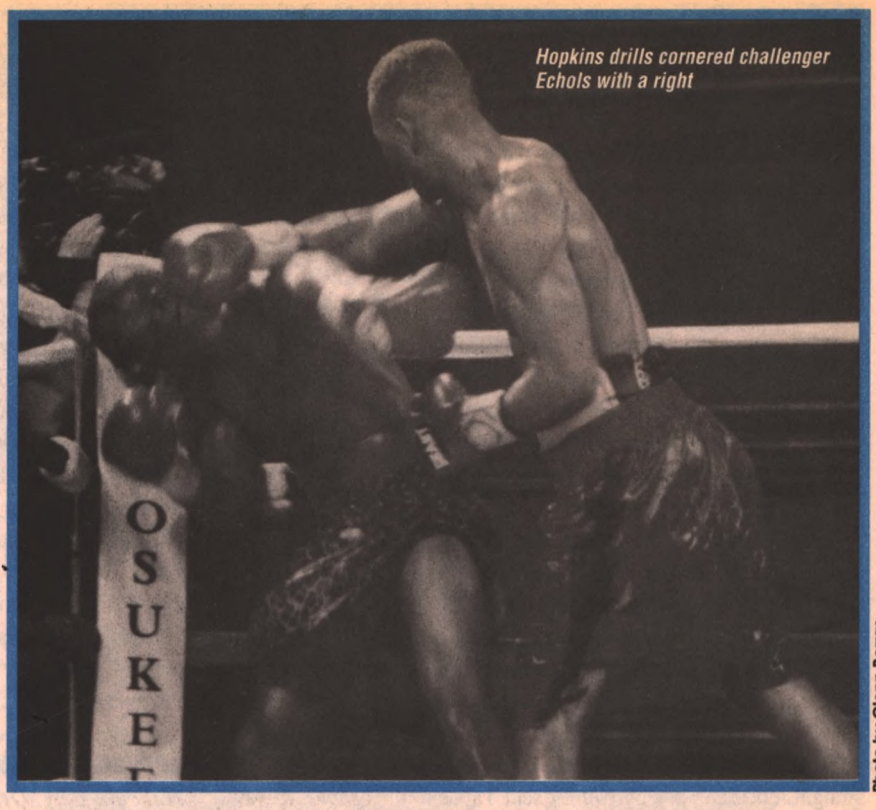


For the next 11 rounds, Hopkins jabbed and moved, countered flawlessly, threw straight punches between the wide hooks of his opponent, got the better of toe-to-toe exchanges, and generally dominated a top-notch fighter to win a wide, convincing, unanimous decision. And in doing so, he showed what separates great punchers from great champions.

• • • •

Bernard Hopkins

Bernard Hopkins W 12 Antwun Echols



Hopkins drills cornered challenger Echols with a right

Photo by Glenn Borras

Miami, Florida: Funny, but you would think that an almost-35-year-old world champion, a guy who is widely regarded as one of the top dozen pound-for-pound fighters, who has held on to his title for four-plus years and 10 defenses, wouldn't have to audition for a starring role. IBF middleweight champion Hopkins, however, believes the best is yet to come. All those millions he hasn't earned? Recognition he hasn't received? Hey, "The Executioner" knows a well-timed, properly showcased performance—accompanied by a few chest-thumping, somewhat controversial sound bites—might be enough to transform him into one of those "overnight" success stories.

You know, the kind that actually is 15 years or so in the making. Hopkins, 36-2-1 (27), didn't deliver the spectacular knockout he had promised, but he was pretty much dominant throughout in pitching a near-shutout at mandatory challenger Echols, 22-3-1 (22), at Miccosukee Indian Gaming. The bout was televised in prime time, by Fox SportsNet. After barely escaping a knockdown and losing the first round on all three official scorecards, Hopkins adopted a modified rope-a-dope strategy, drifting to the ropes, drawing in the overly aggressive Echols, and countering effectively. American judges Bill Ray, John Rupert, and Vaughn Laprade took note and awarded the Philadelphian a lopsided unanimous decision on tallies of 119-109, 118-110, and 118-110, respectively.

"They called me an old man. Echols called me an old man. [Former opponent] Robert Allen called me an old man. David Reid calls me an old man," crowed Hopkins, who was his customarily taut 158½ pounds. "Did I look like an old man tonight?

"I don't want $20-million or $30-million," Hopkins told reporters. "I just want my due. Don't be biased. Just write what you saw. Give me my props."

Hopkins, whose feuds with past promoters Butch Lewis and Dan Goossen have overshadowed his considerable achievements in the ring, had worked himself into a froth at what he perceived to be more slights. Not only was he again fighting for Goossen's America Presents, which was the only bidder of record for the purse offering, but he was doing so for a cut-rate $100,000. Hopkins, however, was determined that, if he had to fight for discounted wages, he at least would demonstrate that the size of his paycheck would not be reflected by the determination of his effort. With the possibility of a multifight deal from HBO on the line, Hopkins wanted to make his turn on Fox a rousing preview of coming attractions.

"This is a statement fight," Hopkins had said a few days beforehand. "See, Echols is in the way of all the things I've gone through hell to get. I got an HBO deal in place that's going to be null and void if I lose. And I won't lose. Not only that, but I'm planning to be spectacular. There will be no backing up, no running, no holding. I'm jumping right on him. If he has any flaws, I will find them and expose them. It could be the first second of the first round."

Oops, change of plan. When Echols, whose own stock in trade is the swift, sensational stoppage, immediately charged at Hopkins, throwing bombs, Hopkins decided that he could win just as impressively by showing a less familiar side of himself.

"I'm a Philadelphia fighter, and proud of it, but Philadelphia fighters are known mainly for fighting coming forward," Hopkins said. "I think I showed the world that Bernard Hopkins can beat people backing up, like Sugar Ray Robinson, like Willie Pep. I showed a little bit of it all tonight."

Echols, 160, from Davenport, Iowa, also showed something. The challenger, who collected a career-high $35,000, could have been credited with a first-round knockdown—referee Frank Santore (USA) ruled that, even though Hopkins had gone down, Echols was guilty of hitting him on the break—and he thwarted a 12th-round assault by Hopkins with an overhand right that nearly dropped the champ again. There aren't a lot of middleweights who could have withstood 12 rounds of what Hopkins was dishing out, much less remained dangerous throughout.

"I can be a better fighter if I take my time. Bernard showed me that," the 27-year-old Echols said. "I got outclassed tonight. There's nothing for me to be ashamed of. It was just a lack of experience. He's a seasoned veteran. He knows what to do. I can't take that away from him."

Hopkins also knows that a verbal jab can count for as much as one in the ring, which is why he has embarked on a campaign to "call out" fighters who can help get him the seven-figure payday he so craves, including WBA super welterweight champ and fellow Philadelphian David Reid.

Promoter: America Presents

(12-12-99)

Bernard Fernandez

Juan Carlos Gomez KO 9 Napoleon Tagoe

Hamburg, Germany: Underlining his claims to be the world's best cruiserweight, Gomez, 189, Germany (via Cuba), inflicted a sustained beating before knocking out a clearly outgunned Tagoe, 189½, Ghana, in the ninth to retain the WBC cruiserweight title before a capacity crowd of 7,000 at the Alsterdorfer Sporthalle. It was his sixth defense of the title he won from Argentina's Marcelo Dominguez on February 21, 1998.

At 6'4", the 26-year-old Gomez towered over his 5'10" opponent, who was ranked eighth in the WBC rankings by virtue of an upset win over Ramon Garbey earlier in the year. Height and reach, however, are not Gomez' only assets. He is an accomplished boxer with sound skills and a solid punch, and the whole package was far too much for Tagoe, also 26, who should be credited for lasting as long as he did.

From the outset, the pattern was clear, and the ultimate outcome was, too. Gomez, 29-0 (24), thrust out a piston-like southpaw jab and afforded Tagoe little opportunity to work inside, the challenger's only chance of making any headway. Tagoe was wobbled in round three by a hard left, and Gomez knocked his overmatched challenger into a neutral corner with a straight left hand in the fourth.

The first of three knockdowns came in the fifth, when another straight left to the jaw by Gomez sent Tagoe to the canvas. It was merely a matter of time before Tagoe's resistance dissipated. After another knockdown in the seventh, Gomez caught Tagoe, 20-3 (13), in round nine with a left uppercut inside, sending him to the canvas yet again. This time, he failed to beat the count of referee Laurence Cole (USA), ending the bout at 1:55 of the ninth round.

After eight rounds, the judges at ringside all saw the fight as a shutout, as Gary Ritter (USA) had it 80-68, and Justo Vazquez (Spain) and Kamen Petrov (Bulgaria) both scored it 80-69.

"I want to accomplish everything at the cruiserweight limit that can be accomplished," Gomez said afterward. "I want to make unifications and I want to fight in Miami. My aim is also to fight in the U.S. as a heavyweight one day."

A showdown with the famed "Hit Man" from Detroit, Thomas Hearns, was being touted for early-2000, possibly in Hong Kong.

"We received an offer for a fight between Gomez and Thomas Hearns in February in Hong Kong," promoter Klaus-Peter Kohl revealed. "The offer and proposed promotion is by the Hearns group. So far, we have not come to a final agreement about that fight. If the Hearns fight doesn't come off, we will try to get Fabrice Tiozzo for a unification showdown."

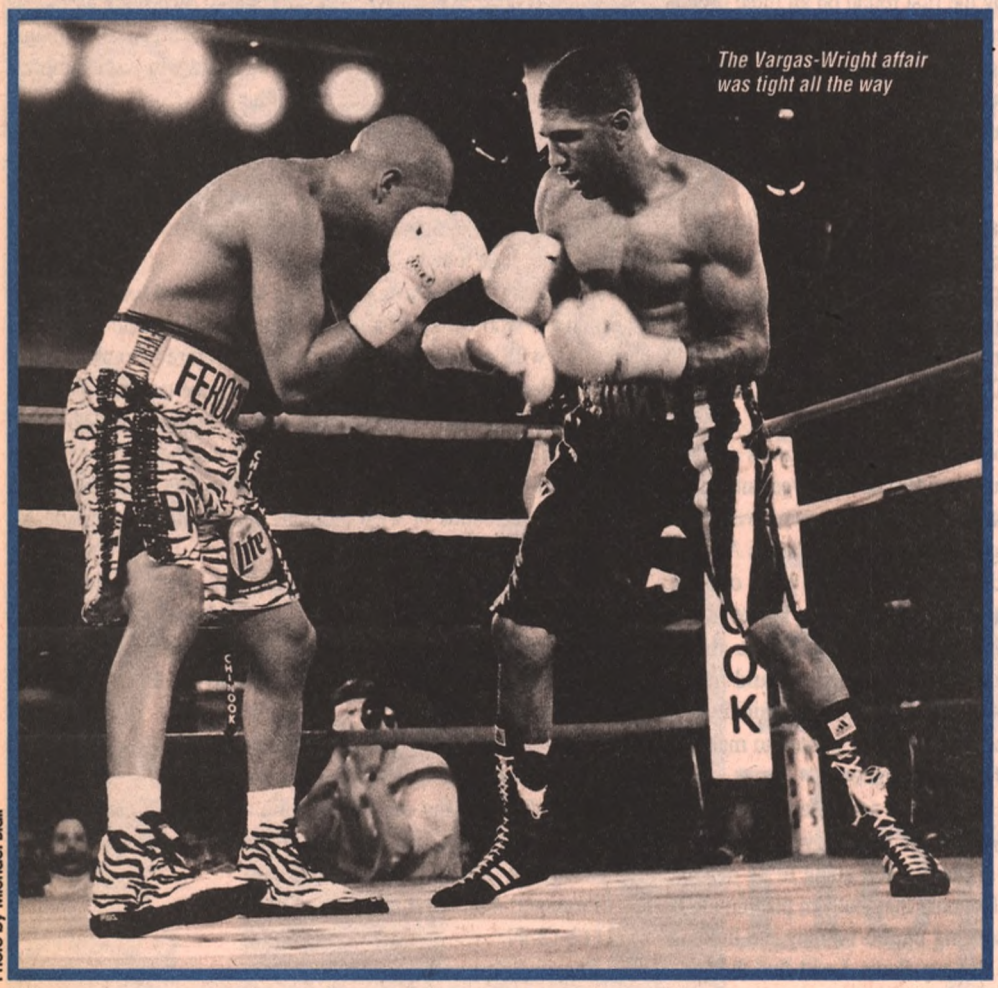
Promoter: Universum Boxing Promotions

(12-11-99)

Brian Doogan

Fernando Vargas W 12 Winky Wright

Lincoln City, Oregon: With a glamour match against Ike Quartey in the offing, Vargas' third defense of the IBF junior middleweight title, against Wright, was regarded as just a "nuisance" mandatory to be gotten out of the way. Vargas had no idea what a nuisance it would be. In the ring at the Chinook Winds Casino, Wright beat Vargas, but the judges didn't let the facts get in the way of a good tale, and awarded a controversial majority decision to the unbeaten champion.



The Vargas-Wright affair was tight all the way

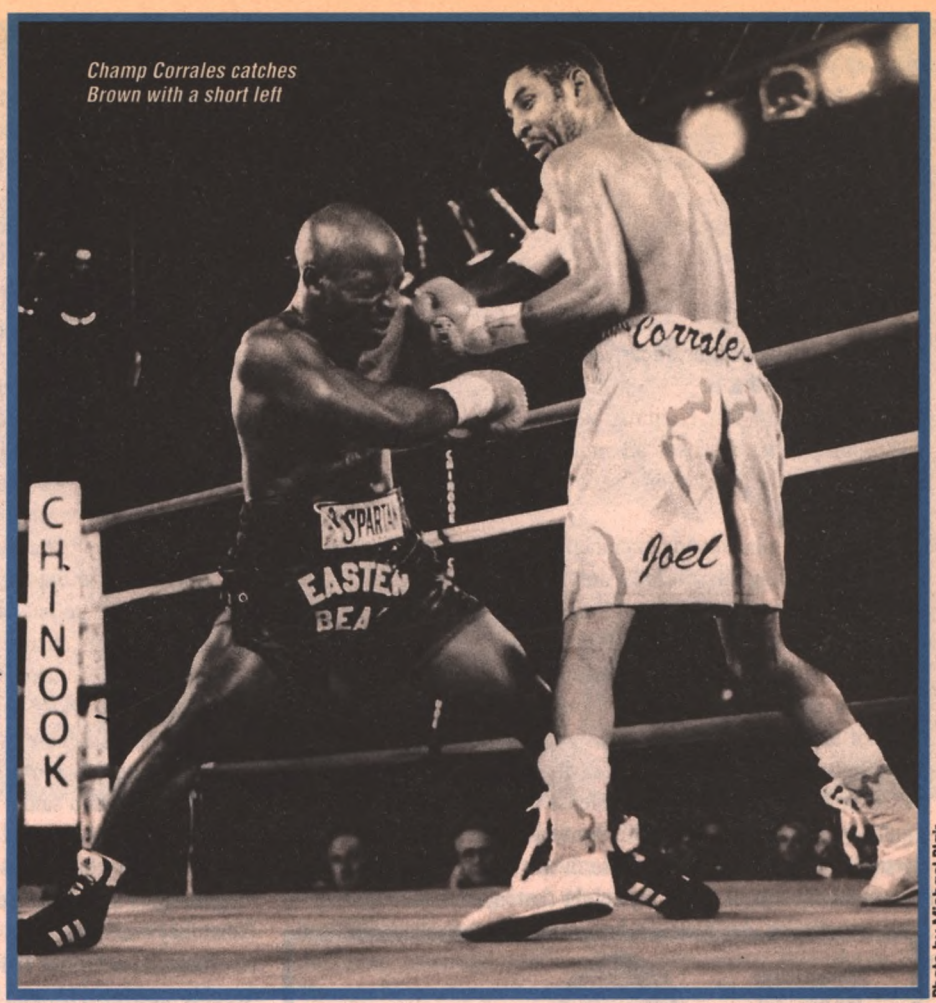
Photo by Michael Blair

Aside from the verdict, the fight itself was an uncommonly good one. Vargas, 154, Oxnard, California, started off flashy and confident, as expected. But by the fifth, it was becoming evident that Vargas was getting hit back and wasn't doing much about it. The clever southpaw Wright, 154, St. Petersburg, Florida, wasn't as visible as the flamboyant titlist—just a better fighter. Once Wright, 28, had established his game, the heated action see-sawed, with the challenger subtly forging into command. By the middle rounds, the young phe-

nom Vargas' relative lack of experience was beginning to show. The more proletarian challenger was doing a job on him. Much had been made of Vargas' self-proclaimed "viciousness" in the prefight ballyhoo, but Wright showed that the name of the game, after all, is *boxing*.

Wright stepped around smartly to apply pressure without becoming reckless. He forced Vargas, 21, to give ground and circle, then pinned his movement with a long right jab. He sporadically punctuated his technical superiority with jolting combinations. And when the champion dug in and rallied, Winky tended to come back with as much or more.

In the 10th, seeming to realize that he had to do something to keep it from slipping away, Vargas utilized all his natural skills in a determined rally. Had he been able to sustain that level through the end of the fight, there would have been no doubt. But Wright came right back to outfight him in an intense and bruising 11th. Finally, on dreadful advice from his corner, Winky made no effort to fight in the closing session.



Champ Corrales catches Brown with a short left

Photo by Michael Blair

Then came the decision. Though most of the rounds were close (the judges disagreed on five), it appeared that Wright had won the tactical battle. He had dictated the terms, forcing Vargas into an almost desperate rear-guard action that was more smoke than fire. In being taken the distance for the first time, Vargas, 18-0 (17), had landed the less telling blows. Debra Barnes scored it 116-112 and Jim Howard had it 115-113, both for Vargas, while Dave Hess saw it a draw, 114-114. Had Wright, 39-3 (24), not given away the final session, he could have gotten a split draw, which still wouldn't have given him the title, but certainly would have spoiled Vargas' immediate plans. Even with the 12th round going to Vargas, THE RING still scored it 115-114 for Wright. The referee was Joe Cortez (USA).

Television: HBO

Promoter: Main Events

(12-4-99)

J.R. Jowett

Diego Corrales W 12 John Brown

Lincoln City, Oregon: They didn't exactly turn it into a "silk purse," but Corrales and Brown managed to put together a pretty good bout after an unpromising first round at the Chinook Winds Casino. Corrales, 130, Sacramento, California, was making the first defense of the IBF junior lightweight crown. Perennial bridesmaid Brown, 128, Atlantic City, New Jersey, was challenging for a world title for a second time in eight months. Together, the rangy, physically unimposing titlist and the stubby, muscular challenger presented a Mutt-and-Jeff combo that threatened initially to result in dreary action.

But Corrales' boxing skills and Brown's stolid determination began to mesh well enough to turn it into a tolerably good contest. The 22-year-old Corrales' advantages in reach, footwork, and boxing savvy quickly put him in command. A classic left hook-right cross had the challenger in trouble in the third, wobbling into the ropes in a daze. But Brown, 31, remained undaunted. He tried to burrow inside where he could use pure strength to manhandle "Chico." Corrales exacted his price, however, with quick, short counters as Brown moved in, then effective smothering at close quarters.

The challenger began to connect in the fifth, however, then made it interesting when he inflicted a cut under Corrales' right eye in the sixth. Corrales kept up his countering, but the damage appeared to rattle his poise and threatened to force the action into the brawl that Brown wanted. The crowd rallied behind the overmatched challenger's uphill task, but Brown's sporadic overhand right bombs weren't enough to turn the action. Much of Corrales' countering was too subtle to impress the fans, while Brown's windmill shots were eye-catching.

The titlist kept up a steady tattoo that piled up points, if not exactly dishing out punishment. Brown, 20-7 (10), simply couldn't put together enough consecutive punches to force the contest onto his terms. But his menacing charges and relentless pressure kept it interesting. Brown's mugging tactics, however

futile, made Corrales, 30-0 (24), appear to retreat into a backdoor victory that was completely justified, yet thoroughly booed. Dennis Ryan (USA) and Glen Hamada (USA) both scored it 116-112 (the same as THE RING), and William James (USA) saw it 117-111. The referee was Mark Nelson (USA).

Television: HBO

Promoter: Main Events

(12-4-99)

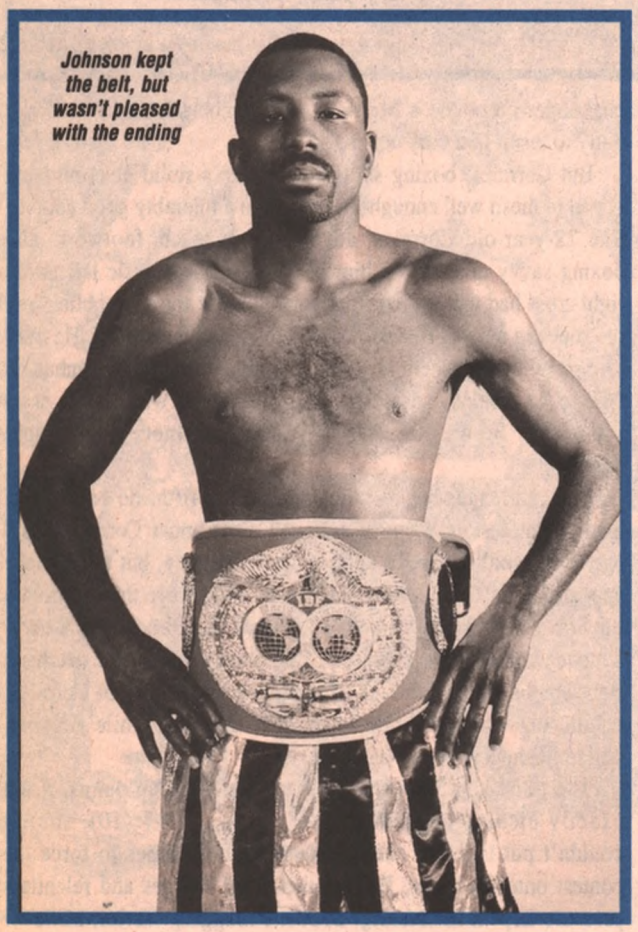
J.R. Jowett

Mark Johnson No-Contest 4 Raul Juarez

Washington, D.C.: Exciting, violent, and ultimately unsatisfying—those three adjectives all apply perfectly to IBF junior bantamweight titlist Johnson's second go-round with Juarez of Mexico.

After three-plus rounds of crackling and occasionally south-of-the-border action, the southpaw Johnson, Washington, D.C., landed a hard right to the body and followed it up with a thunderous low blow that dropped Juarez, 28-6 (15) with 1 no-contest, flat on his back, writhing in pain. Referee Joe Cooper (USA) ruled the low shot unintentional, and the bout was declared no-contest at 2:09 of the fourth round as Juarez was carried from the ring on a stretcher, though many suspected Juarez was not as hurt as he acted. It was Johnson's second defense of the 115-pound title.

The fight, held in the D.C. Armory, lacked the matinee idol hysteria of Johnson's last defense in the same musty old arena, a one-round knockout of top flyweight contender Arthur Johnson in February 1998. But Johnson still came to put on a show.



Johnson kept the belt, but wasn't pleased with the ending

Even though Johnson had stopped Juarez in eight rounds back in August 1996, the hard-hitting Mexican fought without fear in the rematch. After an exploratory first round by both fighters, punctuated by intermittent body work, the bout took off in the second. Johnson, 115, came out stalking, worked Juarez, 114, to the ropes, and stung him with hard lead lefts. Juarez gritted his teeth and found the range as well. Johnson then stepped up the pace with a popping jab that suddenly would turn into a ripping right hook to the left side of Juarez' body. It was a shot he would dig in over and over again.

The third round opened in toe-to-toe war: Johnson fired to the body, heads collided, Juarez tagged Johnson, more headbutting. After Johnson, 28, landed a hard left cross, Juarez landed his best punch of the fight, a powerful right that clearly hurt the champion. When Johnson recovered, he turned up the fire even higher and, in blistering action, drove Juarez, 26, to the ropes.

Johnson came out for the fourth looking for a knockout. He worked a desperate but battling Juarez back to the ropes and rumbled. At one point, Juarez slipped to the canvas, but got right back into the fight. Then came the big low blow, and that was that.

Johnson, 38-1 (26) with 1 no-contest, remained upbeat after the fight, but said Juarez saw the end coming and found an out.

"If it was a low blow, it wasn't one he needed to go to the hospital for," Johnson said. "Since the Luis Santana fight with Terry Norris, everybody now is trying to win belts by laying on the canvas. I feel very bad about taking the no-contest. Boxing for me is beginning to be a joke. Let's stop cheating the fans and give them what they want to see."

Johnson, a former IBF flyweight titlist, hinted he was having trouble making 115, and is itching to move up in 2000 to challenge WBC 122-pound champ Erik Morales.

Television: ESPN2

Promoter: Cedric Kushner Productions

(11-19-99)

John Scheinman

Stevie Johnston W 12 Billy Schwer

London, England: With a marvelous demonstration of his awesome repertoire, Johnston, 133¼, Denver, Colorado, proved why he is increasingly regarded as one of the top fighters in the world by clearly outpointing brave British challenger Schwer, 134¾, England, to retain the WBC lightweight title at Wembley Arena. It was the third defense of his second reign, having lost and regained his belt from Mexican Cesar Bezan.

Only the outstanding courage of former British Commonwealth and European champion Schwer, beaten in his only other world title challenge by then-IBF holder Rafael Ruelas four years earlier, allowed him to last all 12 rounds. Johnston, 29-1 (14), is a will o' the wisp who punches hard and accurately, combining the most pronounced assets of his heroes, Pernell Whitaker and Marvelous Marvin Hagler. He produced an absolute masterclass boxing in London for the first time, the Wembley crowd as appreciative of his skills when the bout was over as they were of Schwer's brave stand.

Johnston's southpaw jab proved the difference in the opening round, which was used more by both men to size each other up. In

the second, Johnston, 27, got more into an aggressive rhythm and unleashed a succession of four rapid-fire punches, though no real damage was caused. A good left uppercut landed later in the round, but Schwer was unfazed. Johnston drew blood in the third, opening a dangerous cut near the corner of Schwer's left eye and inflicting a mark under his right eye in the fourth. By the end of the next round, the challenger's face was all bloodied, a solid left by Johnston having also opened a deep cut on the bridge of Schwer's nose.

Johnston's dazzling skills were too much for Schwer

Photo by John Gichigi/Allsport

Schwer retorted in kind by reopening an old wound over Johnston's right eye in the seventh, and in the next round, he gained renewed hope as Johnston betrayed signs of tiring. It was a false hope. Schwer's bleached-blond hair was going ginger with all the blood pouring from his face in the ninth, and referee Larry O'Connell (England) made a number of close inspections. But valiantly Schwer rumbled on and, incredibly, launched an inspired final-round attack. Most of his punches missed, however, and by the end of the round, Johnston was again picking him off with consummately delivered lefts and rights.

All three judges, Jose Guerra (Mexico), Anek Hongtongkam (Thailand), and Walter Schall (Austria), produced the same score of 118-110 for the champion, as did THE RING.

"Billy was dogged, brave, and persistent and gave a very courageous performance," said Johnston. "I would like to go about unifying some belts, but the politics of it all makes it very difficult."

Schwer, 38-4 (30), graciously accepted defeat and paid tribute to a tremendous champion.

"He's very, very good, an awkward southpaw, and I gave it my best shot, which just wasn't enough," he said. The 29-year-old indicated he may now try to regain the European belt, which he vacated earlier in '99.

Promoters: Panix Promotions, Top Rank
(11-29-99)
Brian Doogan

Sven Ottke W 12 Glen Johnson

Dusseldorf, Germany: Not even the inspiration of Sugar Ray Leonard could help Johnson. The Leonard protege proved game, but succumbed to the better boxing of Ottke, 167½, who again showed his distinct lack of punching power, but did more than enough to earn a unanimous decision to retain the IBF super middleweight title in front of 4,000 at Philipshall. It was the German's fourth defense of the title he won in an upset of Philadelphian Charles Brewer in October 1998.

Ottke may be viewed as one of the more vulnerable champions around, but he keeps winning with relative ease in the terribly mediocre 168-pound division. The 32-year-old champion had 330 bouts as an amateur, and his nimble footwork and quick punching frustrates and confuses opponents, even those like Thomas Tate who are fancied to beat him. The American mandatory challenger was flat and impotent when he encountered Ottke last September and was well behind on points when, controversially, a cut on Ottke's left eye, ruled the result of a headbutt, meant the issue was decided on the scorecards after 10 rounds. Ottke took a unanimous decision. Here, he was no less awkward and befuddling for Johnson, 167, who realized he had to draw Ottke into a fight. The German was far too wise to do anything but box, however.

Johnson's jabbing was almost on a par with Ottke's over the opening round, and he got home with a few good hooks in the second. But Ottke, 17-0 (2), was gradually beginning to accentuate his superior boxing ability, and from the third round through the middle part of the fight, he rarely allowed Johnson, 36-4 (25), to gain any encouragement or foothold.

The challenger did try to rough things up and won a series of exchanges in the 10th, but Ottke remained composed. He boxed out the final two rounds in the face of desperate punching by Johnson to earn a clear decision win despite there being no knockdowns and neither fighter experiencing serious trouble.

Judges Luca Montello (Italy) and Arno Pokrand (Germany) both scored it 115-113, while Harry Davis (Canada) had it 116-112, all for Ottke. THE RING also scored for Ottke, 116-113. The referee was Randy Neumann (USA).

Promoter: Wilfred Sauerland
(11-27-99)
Brian Doogan

Garza and Ishii let loose in a thriller

Nestor Garza KO 12 Kozo Ishii

Nagoya, Japan: In what was undoubtedly Japan's Fight of the Year, pugnacious Mexican Garza, 122, barely retained the WBA super bantamweight title in a give-and-take brawl with hard-punching Japanese challenger Ishii, 121½. The always-entertaining Garza withstood a seventh-round crisis to come back and score a TKO victory at 2:30 of the 12th and final session.

Going into the 12th, judge Silvestre Abainza (Philippines) had it 107-102 for Ishii, Erkki Meronen (Finland) scored it 107-103 for Garza, and Manuel Rodriguez (Colombia) had it dead even at 105-105. Both fighters sensed that the 12th round would decide the contest, and the game Ishii came forward aggressively, but the more experienced champion landed a counter left hook to floor him. Ishii lifted himself off the canvas, but looked so obviously hurt and exhausted that referee Enzo Montero (Venezuela) had to declare a halt to the very competitive slugfest just as Garza was beginning to follow up.

It was a surprise that Ishii recklessly brawled with the Mexican champ from the start. Garza was known for his hard punching, but Ishii occasionally overpowered him with stronger punches in the early going. Ishii, 22, started the fireworks and exchanged in hot, toe-to-toe rallies with the willing Garza, 22, in the opening round and had the champ bewildered with his furious opening attack.

Garza came back to win the second canto with more accurate punches. The third was dominated by Ishii, who landed a very solid right that snapped Garza's head back, and the advantage continued going back and forth over the next three rounds.

Prior to the seventh session, Ishii waived his hand to the crowd to predict that he would finish the champ that round—and came very close to doing precisely that. Ishii had Garza reeling to the ropes with a flurry of punches, and the Mexican barely weathered the storm.

Ishii aggressively pressed the action in the eighth until the closing seconds, when Garza landed a vicious left hook that almost toppled Ishii before the challenger was saved by the bell. Though Ishii was clearly the aggressor in the ninth and 10th, Garza was more effective in penetrating his guard with inside blows to the face and midsection. Ishii came back, though, to dominate the 11th, bouncing several strong jabs off of Garza's face.

But by the 12th, the game and gutsy Ishii seemed somewhat spent due to his busy pace throughout the fight. Still, he kept going forward, but was caught by Garza's well-timed left hook. The Mexican, nicknamed "El Tigre," was just starting to surge forward to finish the affair when the ref intervened with only 30 seconds remaining.

"I didn't expect Ishii to be so strong and courageous," the jubilant Garza, 37-1 (29), said following his second successful defense of the WBA crown. "He could punch very hard and was one of the strongest opponents I have faced. I'm happy to have retained my title."

"I wanted to win this fight, and thought I could win in the middle of this bout," the crestfallen Ishii, 21-2 (14), said after seeing his 14-fight winning streak snapped. "I received a good punch in the final round. I want a rematch with Garza."

A rematch may come eventually, but first Garza is likely to defend against former flyweight and junior bantamweight champ Danny Romero.

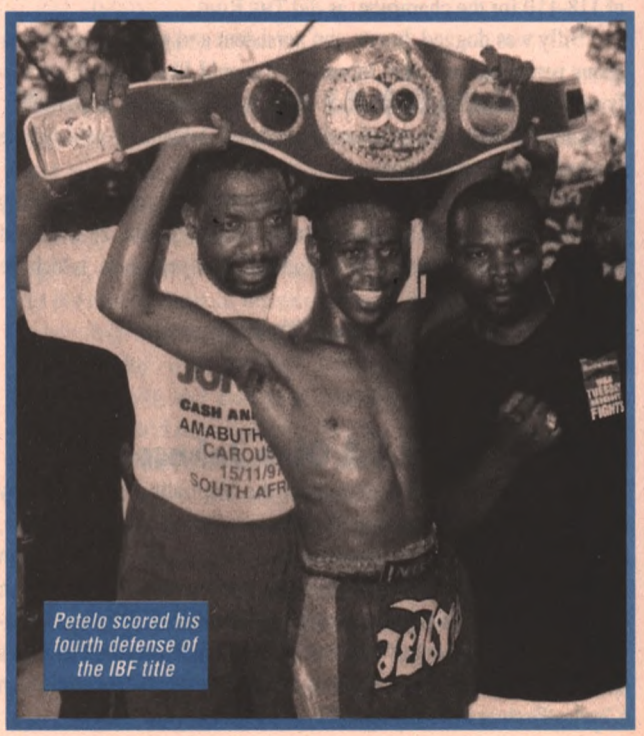
Promoters: Tenyu Maruki Promotions, Teiken Promotions

(11-21-99)

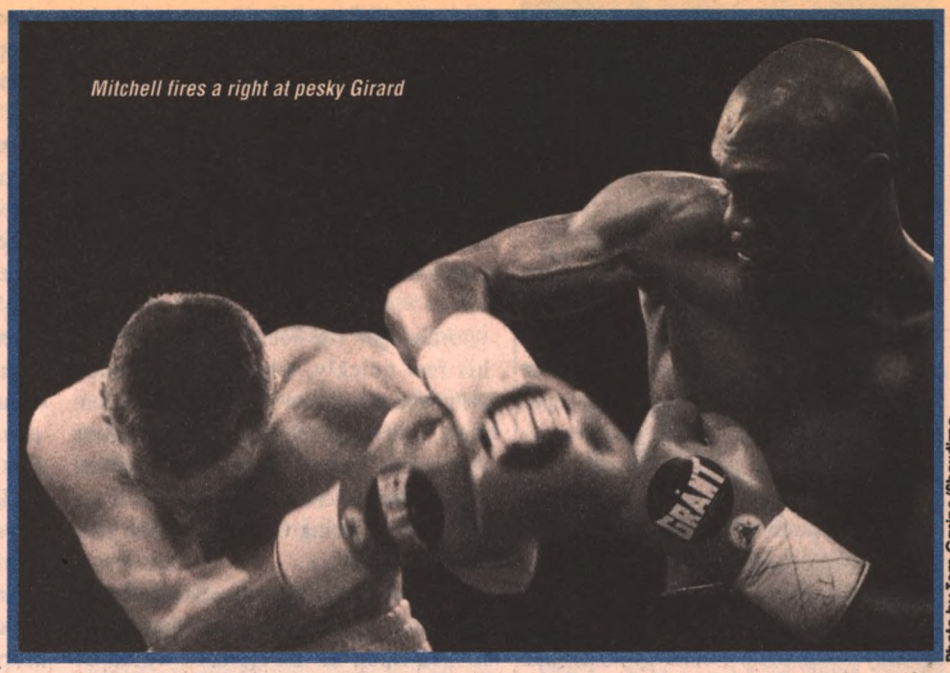
Joe Koizumi

Zolani Petelo W 12 Juanito Rubillar

Peterborough, England: With a solid southpaw jab and an industrious workrate, Petelo, 104½, South Africa, proved too much for game challenger Rubillar, 106½, Philippines, and took a unanimous decision to retain the IBF mini-flyweight title for the fourth time.



Petelo scored his fourth defense of the IBF title



Mitchell fires a right at pesky Girard

Photo by Tom Casino/Showtime

Shorter and stockier, Rubillar appeared to be the harder puncher, but his attacks were sporadic. He gave up the WBC International title to qualify for this challenge, but didn't show the determination to produce a truly concerted effort until the final two rounds. Petelo was methodical if unspectacular, boxing out of an accentuated crouch and accumulating points off his piston-like jab. But he never had it completely his own way. His swollen face betrayed the signs afterward.

When the 24-year-old Petelo, 15-2-2 (8), utilized his jab, as he did in the first two rounds, he dictated. The challenger landed a punch after the bell ending the first and did the same, or at least attempted to, at the end of each of the next five rounds. Referee Dave Parris (England) issued a warning, but no points were deducted. When the fight moved inside, the sturdier Rubillar, 16-8-5 (5), was most productive. He won the third round fighting on the inside, and Petelo was wisely back on his bike in the fourth.

Many of the more eye-catching shots were landed by Rubillar in the fifth, and during the sixth the challenger applied steady pressure to win the round. Despite blood coming from his nose, Petelo regained the initiative in round seven and, over the next few rounds, made full use of his physical and technical advantages. But Rubillar was not done.

Though he was wild in his methods, the challenger rallied hard over the final two rounds, the swelling around his opponent's eyes giving him encouragement. But Petelo was too skilled to be caught so easily, and Rubillar's crude swings were never going to achieve the knockout he needed.

All three judges scored the fight for the South African champion. Roy Francis (England) had it 118-112 and Hilton Whitaker (USA) saw it 118-110, but, ironically, fellow South African Stanley Christodoulou viewed it much closer at 115-114. THE RING saw it 117-113 for Petelo.

Promoter: Golden Fists

(12-3-99)

Brian Doogan

Byron Mitchell D 12 Bruno Girard

Tunica, Mississippi: Challenger Girard, 36-3-1 (5), had never fought outside of Europe and almost always in his native France. Still, there have been a number of French champions lately, and it was tempting to think he might make it a competitive fight. Trouble is, even his own countrymen were quick to note that he has no punch at all.

WBA super middleweight champ "Gator" Mitchell, 20-0-1 (16), is a decidedly deadly banger and showed it in his previous outing when he sent venerable Frankie Liles to the canvas three times in the 11th to capture the title. Of the 20 wins on the record of the 26-year-old Mitchell, Ozark, Alabama, 13 had come by first or second-round knockout.

The fight at the Grand Casino promised to be a quick, easy spectacle that would give the new champ a little walking-around money before he had to defend the belt against somebody who might threaten him. The division lacks well-known stars, having fallen on lean times ever since Roy Jones moved up to light heavyweight.

In the first few rounds, it was shocking to see just how light the 29-year-old Girard's punches were, although he was much slicker and moved his head and feet much better than typical stand-up Europeans. Mitchell, 167, was boxing well too, and his punches were real punches. Girard, 166, started busting up early, and it didn't look like it would last long.

But gradually, two things became apparent: Girard was still in there, and Mitchell was confused and tired, mostly plodding around flatfooted while waiting to land the big one. And Girard, like a mosquito you can never swat, kept stinging him with his mostly pitty-pat hits. His shots were timed beautifully, and it was becoming easier to see how he'd piled up all those victories even without a punch.

By the late rounds, it was anybody's fight. Would Mitchell catch up to Girard? Would Girard wear Mitchell down to a nub? Or would Girard bleed to death right in the ring? He was oozing blood from the nose, the eyes, you name it. Referee Elmo Adolph (USA) constantly slipped around in Girard's blood along with the fighters.

And guess what. It turned out to be a competitive, exciting fight after all. When it was over, even Adolph was applauding.

Judge Fred Steinwinder III (USA) scored it 114-114, Uriel Aguilera (Colombia) saw it 115-113 for Girard, and Sam Viruet (USA) scored it 116-114 for Mitchell, resulting in a split draw. Mitchell kept the title, but lost some degree of reputation, though THE RING scored in his favor by a tally of 115-114.

The 168-pound division may be lacking in star quality, but it still can offer exciting matchups. And this one cries out for a rematch.

Television: Showtime

Promoter: Don King Productions

(12-11-99)

Ivan Goldman ■

Michael Grant

(Continued from page 21)

was into the sport. He's admitted as much during a number of interviews, stating he would rather be a basketball or football star than a boxer.

So Grant could not have seized the moment at a better time. His easy-going demeanor in the ring had been a turnoff to many fans, creating a swirl of doubts about his willingness to fight all-out. That skepticism surfaced after a pair of dishwater victories over Ahmad Abdin, a former sparring partner of Grant's, and Lou Savarese in '99—opponents he was expected to knock out easily. Instead, Grant pursued a safety-first approach that left many dumbfounded. Against Golota, that changed quickly when Grant wound up on his can for the first time in his career with less than a minute remaining in the first round.

Distinguishing Grant the fighter from Grant the person isn't easy. The "FTS" Grant wore on his trunks for the Golota bout stands for "Flip The Switch." But the fact is, there is no switch on Grant. Whereas some fighters and athletes have a certain Jekyll-Hyde personality when they compete—Roy Jones even has a name for his alter ego; he calls it R.J.—Grant seems to maintain almost the same persona in the ring as he does outside it. As he touched gloves with Golota, he said "God Bless" to his Polish adversary.

Any lingering questions about Grant's toughness, however, came to a screeching halt when Golota delivered a booming right to Grant's chin. Stunned by the force of the blow and by the realization that he'd been knocked down, Grant quickly rose. He wore a silly grin, as if thinking, *Did this really happen*? And soon, Grant found himself in trouble again, with Golota, 34-4 (28), closing in for what appeared to be an upset knockout. He dropped Grant a second time near the end of the round, though Grant gathered himself in time to survive.

The switch was flipped. From then on, Grant knew he was in a fight. By the fifth, his left eye was swollen nearly shut and the danger of losing his first pro fight—and any hope of a title shot in the immediate future—had become a strong possibility. That's when Grant turned things around. He won the fifth, the first round he won on all three judges' scorecards, by establishing his powerful overhand right. Trailing by five rounds on the consensus scorecard entering the 10th, Grant knew he needed a knockout to win. He turned to his big right again, nailing Golota midway through the round. Dazed from the blow, Golota was fodder for Grant, who followed with a combination that dropped his adversary.

Although "The Foul Pole" was back on his feet quickly, when referee Randy Neumann asked him if he wanted to continue, Golota, inexplicably thinking he was way behind in the scoring, shook his head no. Neumann waved the fight over at the 1:31 mark, giving Grant the victory by technical knockout.

If Grant ever does become a world champion, it's the Golota fight that will be looked upon as the fight in which he proved he was more than just a front-runner. The Golota victory should also help Grant obtain his first pay-per-view fight sometime in 2000. As of mid-December, Grant's representatives, Craig Hamilton and Jim Thomas, were working toward a possible fight in mid-March against a variety of opponents ranging from undisputed heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis to WBC number-one contender John Ruiz.

"I look at it this way: The Andrew Golota we fought was the one that fought Riddick Bowe," Hamilton said. "Michael was able to get off the floor and do something Riddick Bowe wasn't able to do. That was a fight where Michael learned that everything isn't going to always go your way. You have to react to adversity, and how you react to adversity is what makes the difference. I don't think Michael will ever forget that fight as long as he lives. He faced a guy who was willing to take chances. Mike has to take some time to reflect on that. Anyone would tell you the hardest thing to do in boxing is to get up off the floor and win."

Further proof of Grant's growing status comes from HBO Sports Senior Vice President Lou DiBella.

"In the Golota fight, we did about a 10 rating, which is one sign, and I got a call from *60 Minutes*, and they're thinking about doing a feature on Grant," said DiBella. "I'm not saying *60 Minutes* is going to definitely do it, but they're thinking about it. I know Michael got knocked down in the Golota fight, but I think that people are starting to see how much of an exciting fighter Michael is.

"Plus on top of that, we're talking about a nice kid, a good, decent kid who's a good family guy with no baggage. He's a lot of fun to talk to and be around. Whether Michael Grant is going to be the next heavyweight champion of the world, I don't know. No one knows, but people are interested in him. They're watching his fights. With his personality, I think he would be a very popular heavyweight champion—and I think he would be good for the sport."

DiBella also pointed out that Grant never drew a 10 rating, which translates into roughly 26 million viewers, before the Golota fight. Grant's previous best was an eight rating in January '99 for his lackluster performance against Abdin.

When Grant was ready to leave THE RING offices after the December photo shoot, he noticed a big poster of himself hanging on a door. He playfully walked up and outstretched his huge arms as if to hug the image, saying, "Someone believes in me."

There may still be some bumps ahead, but it's apparent Grant won't be mistaken for someone in the NBA or NFL—or the Jamaican bobsled team anymore. ■

Gaspar Ortega

(Continued from page 47)

saved his life. That's beautiful and makes me feel so good."

Ortega's missionary spirit, given full expression when John Hicks, a friend in Connecticut, located him in New York shortly after his retirement from the ring in 1965 and secured him a job and apartment, was in evidence even in his fighting days—although little charity was shown toward his 185 opponents, 143 of whom he beat, 69 by knockout, with his only defeats by stoppage being to Hall of Famer Griffith and, near the very end of Ortega's career, Italian Sandro Mazzinghi. Referee Joe Cortez owes much of his present eminence to Ortega, having been drawn to the sport by and taken under the wing of the 1950 Mexican Golden Gloves bantamweight champion.

"We lived on the same block on 99th

Street in New York, and I noticed him one day jumping from one roof to another, nothing else to do," said Ortega, recently introduced at a Ring 8 Veteran Boxers' Association meeting in New York, one of his rare moments in the spotlight since hanging up the gloves. "He said he liked action and what else was there to do? Well, I got to know him better, and he began to follow me to the gym and to the park when I would train. Pretty soon, he wanted to be a fighter, too, and in 1961, he won a national Golden Gloves title and, some time later, turned pro.

"I took him around the country with me, and when I would box, usually the main event, I would say to the promoter that I need a four-round, six-round fight for my fighter. We trained together. But he was a smart boy and retired and did good. I feel good about that because I helped save another kid.

"He calls me twice a month at least. He thinks he's my son! I do feel proud whenever I see him working a big fight. He's my boy."

There was not much to elevate Ortega from his squalid existence as a boy in Tijuana. The imperatives were basic, the hunger in the belly rendering the niceties of life obsolete. His father and mother met on the battlefield in the Mexican revolution of 1916-'18 and were never a day apart in 65 years. What Ortega earned in the ring, he sent home, keeping only enough to feed himself and his own family in New York. When his fighting days were over, he had next to nothing to his name.

"But what I did for my family was more than many people who are rich," he said. "I retired with no money, no nothing. But my heart was happy because I never threw my money away. What was my family able to do with the money? Survive. I'm so happy I was able to do something for them."

His giving nature resulted in future IBF junior middleweight champion Yory Boy Campas wearing Ortega's Indian headdress into the ring when he made his first appearance in Tijuana.

"He was having lunch, and the men with him invited me over, saying he's another Indian," he recalled. "'Let me see his feathers then,' I said. He didn't have any. So I gave him mine."

Last October, Ortega met up with former conqueror Griffith, and he asked the former welterweight and middleweight king why he postponed their contest the day before they were due to meet in a title fight in 1961.

"I don't know," said Griffith, mischievously. Ortega gave a knowing smile. When the fight finally happened, Ortega was overtrained. He was knocked out in the 12th round, and would never receive another chance to become world champion.

"Nevertheless, I want my grandchildren to be able to say their grandfather was a great fighter," he said.

Better than that, they can stand proud and say confidently that Grandpa was a great man. ■

Brian Doogan is THE RING'S European correspondent.

Stephan Johnson

(Continued from page 51)

ed weight of 150 pounds, he told Johnson on the flight home that it might be best for him to hang up the gloves for good.

"I asked him what he was going to do, and he asked me what I thought he should do," said Woods. "I told him he should retire, not because he lost the fight, but because of the type of person he was. He was such an articulate, humble man who didn't need boxing. I told him, 'The decision is yours, and whatever decision you make, I'll be with you.' Three days later, he said he wanted to continue. At that time I thought my job was to get him back in the ring as soon as possible. It was a confidence issue."

Woods arranged for the bout in Greenville, South Carolina, but was contacted by that commission and told that because Johnson was under suspension, the fight was in jeopardy. Woods had Johnson immediately fax the results of a CATscan he had taken at New York's Mt. Sinai Hospital one week after the Vanderpool fight, which showed no damage, to local promoter Walter Johnson, who delivered it to the commission. After passing some other standard exams, he was cleared to fight Otilio Villarreal at the Bi-Lo Center. James Knight, a spokesman for the state's Department of Labor, Licensing, and

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Stephan Johnson

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Regulation, said they were not bound by Ontario's ruling because Canada is a foreign country. In a competitive scrap, Johnson won a 10-round decision, and earned $3,000.

"It was a good 10-round fight, and Stephan was never in danger, but he had to work all the way," said Woods. "There was no sign of the previous injury, and Stephan looked better than I had seen him look in a while. I always told him that at age 31, he couldn't fight like he did at age 23. He didn't have to make everything a war, just to satisfy the bloodthirsty fans. In that fight, he used his experience and his smarts and did real well."

When Tayashi learned that Johnson fought without fulfilling the requirements of his suspension, he was livid. He believed the CATscan taken in Toronto showed evidence of bleeding on the brain. "It was normal, but borderline normal," he said. "I would have never let him fight with a CATscan like that. The jurisdiction that puts you on the list should be the one to remove you from the list. Even if he had passed the standard tests required by South Carolina and was taken off the suspension list, I would not have allowed him to fight again in Ontario without passing our tests."

A week later Johnson happily accepted an offer of $10,000 to fight undefeated contender Vernon Forrest, but was even more thrilled when the fight with Vaden became available a few days after that. Matchmaker Carl Moretti of Main Events was asked to put Vaden on the undercard of Grant-Golota as a favor to Grant's adviser, Craig Hamilton, who also served in that capacity to Vaden. Moretti contacted New York-based agent Johnny Bos in early-September for an opponent, and was told that Johnson would be an ideal candidate.

"I was glad to take the Vaden fight because it was a lot safer, and we would get paid the same as if we fought Forrest," said Woods. "Plus we would get the USBA title, which we could hopefully parlay into a title shot. Stephan knew he was being used as the opponent and would have to upstage the other guy. He was a realist, but knew this fight could lead to something big."

"This was a great opportunity for Stephan," said Bos. "It was a very winnable fight for him, and it could easily maneuver him into a title fight. I had heard Stephan was hospitalized in Toronto, but it was attributed to heat exhaustion. I spoke with Stephan a lot, and he always seemed lucid, sharp as a tack. There was nothing wrong with the match with Vaden on paper."

The fight with Vaden was actually made in early-September, and was prominently listed as the co-feature to Grant-Golota in the Associated Press listings of future fights that appears regularly in worldwide newspapers. Bos believes the criticism leveled by Tayashi is self-serving, because Tayashi did nothing to stop the fight before it occurred.

"He had to have seen the fight listed in 'future fights.' It was there for two months, and he said nothing to nobody," said Bos. "If he was so concerned, why didn't he pick up the phone and tell somebody to stop it? Why wait until a week after the fight to make a stink? Anybody can come around after the fact and criticize what happened. That fight was made for months, and he said nothing."

Moreover, says Bos, it was not as if Johnson was licensed to fight without having to pass tests. "Every state has their own exams, and Stephan passed those exams in three states," he said. "That psychometric examination is useless unless you have something to compare it to. It is supposed to check a person for brain damage over the course of time. What good is it going to do if a doctor with a blue coat and 52 cents in his pocket comes back in 20 minutes and says, 'What color was my jacket and how much did I have in my pocket?' if there is no previous data to compare it to? Taking that test just once after a knockout doesn't prove anything. It's a crock."

Woods thought it was necessary for Johnson to keep busy while waiting for Vaden, so he matched him with Calvin Moody, whose record was an unenviable 9-60-2 (3), in Albany, Georgia, on October 2. "I wanted a whack-out, so Stephan could have a knockout going into the Vaden fight," said Woods. "I wanted him to have some momentum going into such a big crossroads bout."

The Moody fight hit a snag early on when Thomas E. Mishou of the Georgia Boxing Commission checked Johnson's status on the Internet in late-September and saw he was still suspended, even though it had been over a month since the win in South Carolina. He immediately contacted matchmaker Bobby Mitchell and told him that on the basis of the Ontario suspension, Johnson would not be allowed to fight in Georgia. In a fax dated September 22, he wrote that Johnson and heavyweight Nathaniel Fitch were not viable opponents for the show. "Each requires a substantial amount of medical certification before they can enter the ring," he wrote. "As far as Johnson is concerned, you might consider dropping him from the card. I cannot help him with Ontario, they need to get his medicals, confirm them, evaluate their authenticity, and then lift his suspension. You have a little over a week to get this done."

When Woods was apprised of Johnson's status, he appealed to the South Carolina commission to have Fight Fax remove him from the list on the basis of the fight there.

"Normally, a commissioner will call us and tell us to remove somebody from the suspension list," said Phill Marder, head of Fight Fax. "Then we ask for something in writing. As Johnson had fought in South Carolina, we didn't realize he was still on the list. And when we were faxed his medical clearance, we took him off the list."

When Mishou was told by the promoter that Johnson had been removed from the list, he confirmed it himself by checking the Internet, and approved the fight on September 27.

"My assumption was that he satisfied the requirements for reinstatement," said Mishou. "There was no reason to look further. You are either on or off the list. He was off the list."

Johnson knocked out Moody in three rounds, earned $2,000, and went into the Vaden fight bubbling with enthusiasm. "I told him after Vaden, we could probably get Vargas, then maybe De La Hoya or Trinidad," said Woods. "He could retire with a nest egg and get into something else. That was the plan. I was pretty certain we could get Vargas, and was hoping to get one of the others. Either way, if we beat Vaden, things would have looked real good."

After taking a CATscan, electrocardiograph, and eye and HIV tests, Johnson was approved to fight in New Jersey by Dr. Charles Wilson, chief physician for the New Jersey State Athletic Control Board. Although the state has come under some criticism for allowing the fight to occur, boxing

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Stephan Johnson

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commissioner Larry Hazzard was quoted in the New York *Daily News* as saying, "Everything was in place," and that he was unaware of the Ontario suspension. Considering the fact that Johnson had been taken off the suspension list two fights earlier, there was no reason or obligation for Hazzard to know about it. But if there was bleeding on the brain, how could Dr. Wilson have reviewed a CATscan and still allowed the fight to take place? There has been discussion that the Mt. Sinai CATscan might have suggested evidence of "slight axial bleeding."

"That was a suspicion, but there was nothing concrete," Dr. Wilson was quoted as saying in the *New York Post* on December 9. "It was open to my interpretation, and it was my interpretation that this CATscan should not prevent this man from continuing his career in New Jersey. I'm full of regrets about this young man's death. I feel for his family. But I don't feel that I contributed in any way to this man's demise."

A few days after Johnson's death, a press conference was held at Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn, where Johnson trained for many years. In attendance were his mother Ira Johnson, fiancee Bonnie Smith, her 14-year-old son Corbin Erby (an aspiring amateur boxer who worshipped Johnson), and family spokesman Mercer Cook, an investment banker whom Johnson trained in a white-collar boxing class at an Equinox Gym.

"Stephan always focused on the positive, so we want to focus on the positive," said Cook. "We're not looking for negatives. We're not mad at anybody. We want to celebrate Stephan's life because he was living his dream. Not too many people get to do that."

Johnson's mother said that for many years she implored her son to take up a safer vocation, but he always scoffed at such notions. While she insisted she was not angry, she did say that she wished referee Earl Morton had acted a bit faster in stopping the Vaden fight.

"I've been asking Stephan to quit boxing since he was in high school," she said. "But he said to me, 'I've never been in jail, I don't do drugs. Let me pursue my passion.'"

While South Carolina is certainly no boxing hotbed, sanctioning only about seven to 10 fight cards a year, they announced with much fanfare on December 16 that they had implemented a host of new rules to strengthen licensing regulations in the state. Among the changes will be the honoring of all national and international suspensions. Said Jim Knight: "This should make South Carolina a pace-setter in the country."

Former heavyweight contender Michael Bentt, who was forced to retire in the prime of his career after suffering a serious head injury, does not think that the changes would do much in the way of protecting fighters from their own inability to quit, even when it's obvious that they should.

"I was in denial for five years," he said. "What happened to Stephan makes it all the more clear how lucky I am. Things like this really make me feel kind of ambivalent. I love the sport, but getting struck down like Stephan did, that's a bitter pill to swallow."

Not so ambivalent was three-time former world champion Iran Barkley, who recently came to his senses and called it quits after fighting for years with a severely damaged eye. He circumvented scrutiny by fighting overseas and in states with little or no regulation.

"I was hurt, really hurt, when I heard about Stephan," said Barkley, as tears welled up in his battered eyes. "It just goes to show how far you can fall. Stephan had to take care of his family, and that was the best way he knew how. I was on the path like him, taking chances to do something I loved. Now it's all taken away from both of us, but he doesn't even get peanuts in the end. I think about him, and I think about me. And I know it could have been the other way around." ■

Robert Mladinich is a freelance writer based in New York City and a regular contributor to this magazine.

New Faces

(Continued from page 60)

school. Everyone knows you, 'He boxes; he's a boxer.' Everyone recognizes you and knows you fight real well."

Davis, however, is not the stereotypical Philly fighter; he's no tough guy wading in behind his left hook. Instead, he's a slippery southpaw who considers himself a boxer-puncher. Despite his slick style, he's been forced to take the back alley route to success. Without a distinguished amateur past like Reid's, Davis has had a few doors slammed shut in his face while looking for fights.

"The thing about Philadelphia fighters, it's always hard for them to get a title shot," said Burt Watson, a veteran Philadelphia boxing figure who serves as Davis' adviser. "I haven't worked with any fighters from Philly in a while, not since the Joe Frazier days. What I like about Calvin is his dedication to the sport. He works and trains hard, and I know he does the things that will help him and his craft.

"Calvin is like a lot of tough kids from the street, and he's at a point that in order to make a living, he's realized he has to make a commitment to be a good, solid human being. He had to make himself a better person and make himself attractive, and he has. I'm not going to waste my time dealing with someone who is a risk. But I don't have to worry about that with Calvin."

Watson is quick to point out that he came into the picture after Davis was already 14-0. It's been trainer/manager Sloan Harrison who has developed Davis' boxing skills, and also served as a surrogate father. Davis' mother, Anna, raised Calvin and his two siblings essentially by herself. He had a strained relationship with his father, who died in 1986, and found himself almost alone after his mother died of cancer in '88.

Through the good times and the bad, Harrison has been in Davis' corner. Harrison met him through his nephew, Sloan Anderson, a budding pro in his own right.

"Calvin comes in the gym, while other guys come in and out," Harrison said. "He's very dedicated, probably the most dedicated fighter I've ever met. What's unique about Calvin is that he finds a way to win; he can adapt to different situations. And he's an easy guy to train. Some guys, the older they get, you can't teach them. Calvin you can still teach. The problem is, no one wants to fight him. This is the year I hope Calvin gets his chance to take the step up, and if he gets the chance at a title, he's going to win it."

Davis was able to recognize at a very early age he had ability. He began boxing when he was 12 years old. Kids in his neighborhood would get boxing gloves for

Christmas and test themselves by sparring on basketball courts. As Davis got older, however, he began to stray into other areas of street life. He spent time in juvenile detention for petty crimes. He carried around the attitude that he did not have to train consistently, because he was better than many of the guys who were in the gym training every day.

One look around the neighborhood, and Davis began changing his wayward ways. The shift began in '93, when Harrison entered his life and when Davis began to actually listen to what older, experienced people were telling him.

"It never got bad. I never used a gun or was involved in anything like that. It was just little stupid, petty things that got me into trouble," Davis said. "But boxing has always kept me focused. I discovered real early I had a skill and took that for granted. I knew what I could do. A lot of people kept telling me not to let my talent go to waste, because there were people from the neighborhood who let it go to waste. I know guys who are standing on street corners who could beat Roy Jones. I know guys playing on basketball courts who could make millions playing, but they all let it go to waste. I didn't want to sit around here and let it go."

So he went back into the gym, applied himself, and turned pro in '94. How far Davis can go remains to be seen. But on the local Philly circuit, Davis has a strong reputation for working hard and being a burgeoning talent.

"Calvin is a well-kept secret," said Percy Custus, a veteran Philadelphia manager/trainer who has watched Davis when he has fought locally. "He's a southpaw and he's flashy. I think he could be a champion one day. He has quick, fast hands and good reflexes. He's shown he has a big heart. I don't see too many weaknesses. He got hurt in his last fight, but he recovered. He doesn't have a big punch, so he could sit down on his punches a lot better. But he's the kind of guy who will wear you down with a lot of punches."

Davis' dreams now are filled with his hand being raised in the air and a title belt being draped around his waist. When that day comes, Davis will undoubtedly think back to the magic gloves, because that's where it all started. ■

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July 1992: The Title Reign of Evander Holyfield: A Reason To Hide ... Or A Reason For Pride? Color Pinup: Buddy McGirt. Interview: Julian Jackson. Also: Kelley-Dorsey, Nelson-Fenech, Kennedy McKinney.

Aug. 1992: Bowe Knows The Big Fight: The Top Contender Analyzes Holmes-Holyfield. Color Pinup: Julian Jackson. Interview: Michael Spinks. Also: Thomas Hearns, Blue Horizon, fighting fear, Toney-Barkley, Greg Haugen.

Sept. 1992: Can Tommy Morrison Punch Out The Theory ... White Men Can't Fight. Color Pinup: Welcome Ncita. Interview: Ken Norton. Also: Reggie Johnson, Jimmy Paul, McGirt-Blocker, Ali-Shavers.

Oct. 1992: The Olympics: Golden Memories ... And Golden Futures? Color Pinup: Reggie Johnson. Interview: Bobby Czyz. Also: Genaro Hernandez, Terry Norris.

Nov. 1992: Foreman vs. Holmes: The Fight Evander Holyfield Should Have Prevented. Color Pinup: Iran Barkley. Interview: Joey Gamache. Also: Hector Camacho, Tracy Patterson, Rudy Zavala.

Dec. 1992: The Final Four: Ruddock vs. Lewis, Holyfield vs. Bowe. Color Pinup: Genaro Hernandez. Interview: Lennox Lewis. Also: Whitaker-Pineda, Bowe-Coetzer, Alex Stewart, Gamache-Lopez.

Jan. 1993: Holyfield vs. Bowe: Who Will Win and Why. Color Pinup: Al Cole. Interview: Vinny Pazienza. Also: James Toney, Terrence Alli, Maurice Blocker.

March 1993: Not Just Another English Muffin: Lennox Lewis Powers His Way Toward The Title. Color Pinup: Leeonzer Barber. Interview: Emanuel Steward. Also: Reggie Johnson, Lopez-Gamache, USA Network.

May 1993: Recapping The Future: Julio

Cesar Chavez' Road To 100-0. Color Pinup: Terry Norris. Interview: Junior Jones. Also: Buddy McGirt, Riddick Bowe, Raul Marquez.

Dec. 1993: The KO Feud Rages On: "I Will Torture You!" Says Riddick Bowe To Lennox Lewis. Color Pinup: Kennedy McKinney. Also: Mississippi boxing, George Foreman, Yori Boy Campas , Carbajal-Kim, Morrison-Moorer.

Jan. 1994: Outrage At The Alamodome: "Sweet Pea" Shafted! Color Pinup: Orlando Canizales. Interview: Kennedy McKinney. Also: James Toney, book of lists, M.A. Barrera.

July 1994: The Upset Epidemic! Carbajal's Conqueror: Chiquita Gonzalez. Color Pinup: Junior Jones. Interview: Rafael Ruelas. Also: Jake Rodriguez, Czyz-Hearns preview, Randall-Chavez II preview.

June 1995: The Tug-Of-War Over Mike Tyson. Color Pinup: Wilfredo Vasquez. Interview: Oliver McCall. Plus: Alejandro Gonzalez, Alexis Arguello, Kostya Tszyu.

March 1996: Whether He Fights Or Not ... Tyson Is Hot! Hot!! Hot!!! Color Pinup: Marco Antonio Barrera. Interview: Jose Sulaiman. Plus: Reggie Tuur, heavyweight prospects, champion's edge.

June 1996: Destined For The Hall Of Fame: Who's In, Who's Out. Color Pinup: Wayne McCullough. Interview: Cedric Kushner. Plus: Danny Romero, Mark Breland, Dynamite Dozen—the next 12.

July 1996: Awesome Again! Tyson Destroys Bruno. Color Pinup: Tyson-Bruno. Interview: Christy Martin. Plus: Chavez-De La Hoya preview, Derrick Gainer, '96 Hall of Fame inductees.

Sept. 1996: Tyson vs. Seldon. Don't Bet On This Fight Until You've Read This Story! Color Pinup: Arturo Gatti. Interview: Butterbean. Plus: Dana Rosenblatt, '92 Olympians, McGuigan-Pedroza.

Nov. 1996 (Special 88-Page Edition): The *KO* 100. Color Pinup: Terry Norris. Interview: Bob Arum. Plus: Roy Jones, Roberto Duran, Joe Cortez.

Dec. 1996: Andrew Golota—Taking The Low Road to Stardom. Color Pinup: Mark Johnson. Interview: Rock Newman. Plus: De La Hoya-Gonzalez, Chuck Bodak, bizarre endings, Chavez-Rosario.

Winter 1996: This Is War! Holyfield-Tyson Will Be Explosive ... And Short. Color Pinup: Roy Jones. Interview: Bernard Hopkins. Plus: Riddick Bowe, David Reid, Holyfield-Qawi.

Jan. 1997 (Special 88-Page Edition): Bowe-Golota II: Hatred And Vengeance ... It's A Beautiful Thing! Color Pinup: Johnny Tapia. Interview: Lou Duva. Plus: Mouse Strauss, heavyweight rematches, Azumah Nelson.

Feb. 1997: KO's 1997 Wish List. Color Pinup: Ike Quartey. Interview: Naseem Hamed. Plus: David Tua, Felix Trinidad, Adolpho Washington, Bobby Czyz.

March 1997: Holyfield's Trainer Tells All! An Inside Look At The Upset Of The Year. Color Pinup: Vinny Pazienza. Interview: Sugar Ray Leonard. Plus: George Foreman, Lupe Pintor, boxing bill, Floyd Mayweather Jr.

Aug. 1997: Oscar Reaches ... But Can't Grasp The Stars. Color Pinup: Nate Miller. Interview: Hector Camacho. Plus: Norris-Trinidad preview, Hall of Fame, Angel Manfredy.

Sept. 1997: A Legitimate Grudge Match! Why Romero-Tapia Could Be The Fight Of The Year. Color Pinup: Oscar De La Hoya. Interview: David Tua. Plus: Ike Quartey, George Foreman, top promoters.

Nov. 1997: Filling In The Missing Pieces: What "The Bite" Means To Boxing. Color Pinup: Christy Martin. Interview: Jim Lampley. Plus: Vince Phillips, British prospects, Iran Barkley.

Dec. 1997: Johnny Tapia Outshines Danny Romero: The Defining Moment In A "Crazy Life." Color Pinup: Genaro Hernandez. Interview: Frans Botha. Plus: Lewis-Akiwande, Don King, Charles Brewer.

Holiday 1997 (Special 88-Page Edition): Holyfield-Moorer II: Can Evander Avenge His Ugliest Defeat? Color Pinup: Vince Phillips. Interview: Mills Lane. Plus: Roy Jones, Baby Jake Matlala, Boxing 2000.

Jan. 1998: De La Hoya Humbles The Macho Man: "Oscar's The Best I've Ever Fought." Color Pinup: William Guthrie. Interview: Mark Johnson. Plus: Johnny Tapia, Pinklon Thomas, defense.

Feb. 1998: Is Lennox Lewis The World's Best Heavyweight? Color Pinup: Charles Brewer. Interview: Marc Ratner. Plus: Otis Grant, Arturo Gatti.

March 1998: Evander Holyfield: For The Real Deal, Lewis Is No Big Deal. Color Pinup: Lou Del Valle. Interview: Lennox Lewis. Plus: David Izon, Meldrick Taylor, rapid weight loss.

May 1998: Living Up To The Hype: Sometimes They Do ... Sometimes They Don't. Color Pinup: David Reid. Interview: Best Of ... (Part III). Plus: Naseem Hamed, Marty Denkin, women's boxing.

June 1998: Lewis vs. Holyfield: Why The Fight Of The Year Isn't Going To Happen. Color Pinup: Evander Holyfield. Interview: Eddie Futch. Plus: Hector Lizarraga, pain, Head-To-Head review.

Aug. 1998: Lewis Bombs Out Briggs: Would The WBC Champ Do This To Holyfield? Color Pinup: Keith Mullings. Interview: Shane Mosley. Plus: Pernell Whitaker, Marco Antonio Barrera, Roberto Garcia.

Sept. 1998: Can Mike Tyson Make A Successful Comeback? Sugar Ray Leonard Has The Answer. Color Pinup: Michael Grant. Interview: Brad Jacobs. Plus: Naseem Hamed, Wayne McCullough, Kirk Johnson.

Oct. 1998: The Ultimate Fantasy Card. Color Pinup: Oscar De La Hoya. Interview: Roy Jones. Plus: Brendan Ingle, NYPD boxing, prospect blueprint.

Nov. 1998 The *KO* 100. Color Pinup: Reggie Johnson. Interview: Tim Austin. Plus: Cesar Bazan, Spencer Oliver, Bobby Czyz.

Dec. 1998: Winning Fights Is Easier Than Winning Fans: Why Can't We Appreciate Roy Jones? Color Pinup: Tim Austin. Interview: Michael Grant. Plus: Christy Martin, Ali Reform Act, one-hit wonders.

Holiday 1998: Toe-To-Toe With The Top 10: Where Does Tyson Fit In? Color Pinup: Shane Mosley. Inteview: Larry Hazzard. Plus: Evander Holyfield, junior middleweights.

Jan. 1999 (Special 88-Page Edition): Oscar Eliminates Chazez ... Now The Real Fights Begin! Color Pinup: Yory Boy Campas. Interview: William Joppy. Plus: Mark Johnson, U.S.A. vs. the world. .

Feb. 1999: Holyfield & Lewis: Did They Hurt Themselves Before They Could Hurt Each Other? Color Pinup: Andrew Golota. Interview: Angel Manfredy. Plus: Mismatches, Bobby Czyz on watching fights.

March 1999: Exposed! Is Hamed Really Hector Camacho In Disguise? Color Pinup: Mike Tyson. Interview: Joe Frazier. Plus: Zab Judah, Vuyani Bungu, Frankie Randall.

May 1999: The Tyson Of Old ... Or Just An Old Tyson? Color Pinup: Luisito Espinosa. Interview: Fernando Vargas. Plus: Antonio Diaz, Sumya Anani, standing eight-count.

June 1999: Will Tyson's Jail Time Be A Career Killer? Color Pinup: Johnny Tapia. Interview: Floyd Mayweather. Plus: Roy Jones, 1999 Hall of Fame, stagnation.

July 1999 (Special 88-Page Edition): De La Hoya vs. Trinidad: The Fight The Public Demands ... But Is It Going To Happen? Color Pinup: David Tua. Interview: Tommy Brooks. Plus: Floyd Mayweather, Tony Marshall, best of the century.

Aug. 1999: Lewis vs. Holyfield II: Should We Expect Anything Different Next Time? Color Pinup: Fernando Vargas. Interview: David Reid. Plus: Ibeabuchi-Byrd, Melissa Salamone.

Sept. 1999: Mayeather vs. Mosley: Who's The Future Of Boxing? Color Pinup: James Page. Interview: J Russell Peltz. Plus: Evander Holyfield, Thomas Hearns, Angel Manfredy.

Oct. 1999 (Special 88-Page Edition): The *KO* 100. Color Pinup: Felix Trinidad. Interview: Jake LaMotta. Plus: Tony Ayala, Erik Morales, Junior Jones.

Nov. 1999: De La Hoya vs. Trinidad: "It's Gonna Come Down To Who The Hell Wants It Most!" Color Pinup: David Reid. Interview: Arturo Gatti. Plus: Roy Jones, Sugar Shane Mosley, Vassily Jirov.

Dec. 1999: David Reid & Fernando Vargas: Olympic Teammates On A Collision Course! Color Pinup: Zab Judah. Interview: Ike Ibeabuchi. Plus: Vitaly Klitschko, Antonio Tarver, Mike Tyson.

Holiday 1999 (Special 88-Page Edition): Lewis-Holyfield II: Why We Demand A Knockout! Color Pinup: Sharmba Mitchell. Interview: Paulie Ayala. Plus: James Toney, James Page & Terronn Millett, decade review.

Jan. 2000: Fool's Gold? Trinidad May Have Tarnished Oscar's Image Forever! Color Pinup: Paulie Ayala. Interview: Tony Ayala Jr. Plus: David Reid, Johnny Nelson.

Feb. 2000: Breakout 2000: Who's Going To Lead The Way In Y2K? Color Pinup: Roy Jones. Interview: Bob Arum. Plus: Shane Mosley, Wise-Chavez, Iran Barkley.

March 2000: Mike Tyson: "I'm Tired Of This Crap!" So Are We, Mike! Color Pinup: Vernon Forrest. Interview: James Page. Plus: Erik Morales & Naseem Hamed, Diego Corrales, women's boxing.

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❑ OCT/83	❑ AUG/88	❑ SEP/91	❑ JUL/96	❑ DEC/98
❑ AUG/84	❑ SEP/88	❑ OCT/91	❑ SEP/96	❑ HOL/98
❑ OCT/84	❑ OCT/88	❑ NOV/91	❑ NOV/96	❑ JAN/99
❑ NOV/84	❑ JAN/89	❑ DEC/91	❑ DEC/96	❑ FEB/99
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❑ MAR/85	❑ NOV/89	❑ MAY/92	❑ FEB/97	❑ JUN/99
❑ MAY/85	❑ FEB/90	❑ JUN/92	❑ MAR/97	❑ JUL/99
❑ JUL/85	❑ MAY/90	❑ JUL/92	❑ AUG/97	❑ AUG/99
❑ AUG/85	❑ JUN/90	❑ AUG/92	❑ SEP/97	❑ SEP/99
❑ DEC/85	❑ JUL/90	❑ SEP/92	❑ NOV/97	❑ OCT/99
❑ JAN/86	❑ AUG/90	❑ OCT/92	❑ DEC/97	❑ NOV/99
❑ JUL/86	❑ SEP/90	❑ NOV/92	❑ HOL/97	❑ DEC/99
❑ FEB/87	❑ OCT/90	❑ DEC/92	❑ JAN/98	❑ HOL/99
❑ SEP/87	❑ NOV/90	❑ JAN/93	❑ FEB/98	❑ JAN/00
❑ OCT/87	❑ DEC/90	❑ MAR/93	❑ MAR/98	❑ FEB/00
❑ NOV/87	❑ JAN/91	❑ MAY/93	❑ MAY/98	❑ MAR/00
❑ DEC/87	❑ FEB/91	❑ JAN/94	❑ JUN/98	
❑ JAN/88	❑ MAY/91	❑ JUL/94	❑ AUG/98	
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WORLDWIDE RATINGS

The ratings of the three major governing bodies recognized by The Ring are supplied by the organizations themselves. They are updated on these pages as soon as they are made available to us. In this issue, the WBA ratings were complied as of November 1999, the WBC as of September 1999, and the IBF as of September 1999.

HEAVYWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Lennox Lewis (GB)	C	C	–
Evander Holyfield (USA)	–	2	C
John Ruiz (USA)	1	3	3
Michael Grant (USA)	2	6	–
David Tua (NZ)	3	7	1
Wladimir Klitchko (UKR)	4	5	–
Andrew Golota (POL)	5	–	10
Larry Donald (USA)	6	9	4
Hasim Rahman (USA)	7	–	5
Henry Akinwande (GB)	8	1	6
Zeljko Mavrovic (CROA)	9	12	–
Kirk Johnson (CAN)	10	–	–
Oleg Maskaev (UKR)	24	4	–
Derrick Jefferson (USA)	28	8	–
Kirk Johnson (CAN)	–	10	8
Vacant	–	–	2
Chris Byrd (USA)	19	–	7
Danell Nicholson (USA)	–	–	9

CRUISERWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Juan Carlos Gomez (CUBA)	C	–	–
Fabrice Tiozzo (FRA)	–	C	–
Vassiliy Jirov (KAZ)	–	–	C
Saul Montana (MEX)	1	1	1
James Toney (USA)	2	–	10
Imamu Mayfield (USA)	3	5	4
Marcelo Dominguez (ARG)	4	–	–
Alex Gonzalez (PR)	5	7	–
Andre Purlette (GUY)	6	8	5
Alexei Ilin (RUS)	7	–	–
Napoleon Tagoe (USA)	8	–	7
Virgil Hill (USA)	9	2	–
Terry Dunstan (GB)	10	–	9
Valery Vikhor (LAT)	–	3	12
Alexander Gurov (UKR)	–	4	–
Akim Tafer (FRA)	–	6	–
Torsten May (GER)	12	9	3
Arthur Williams (USA)	19	10	6
Alex Gonzales (USA)	–	–	2
Dale Brown (CAN)	11	11	8

LT. HEAVYWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Roy Jones (USA)	C	C	C
Michael Nunn (USA)	1	9	–
Clinton Woods (GB)	2	12	–
David Telesco (USA)	3	2	8
Hisashi Teraji (JAP)	4	–	–
Muhammad Siluvangi (ZAI)	5	–	3
Eric Harding (USA)	6	6	9
Reggie Johnson (USA)	7	–	5
Yawe Davis (ITA)	8	–	–
Antonio Tarver (USA)	9	–	1
Greg Wright (USA)	10	–	–
Richard Hall (USA)	–	1	–
Lou Del Valle (USA)	–	3	7
Frank Liles (USA)	–	4	–
Derrick Harmon (USA)	14	5	–
Glenn Kelly (AUSTRL)	13	7	4
Timo Masua (NZ)	–	8	–
Jorge Castro (ARG)	16	10	–
Vacant	–	–	2
Will Taylor (USA)	–	–	6
Lee Osie (SPA)	28	–	10

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Richie Woodhall (GB)	C	–	–
Byron Mitchell (USA)	–	C	–
Sven Ottke (GER)	–	–	C
Glenn Catley (GB)	1	–	–
Eric Lucas (CAN)	2	4	11
Bruno Girard (FRA)	3	1	5
David Starie (GB)	4	6	6
Zafarou Ballogou (TOGO)	5	7	3
Mario Velt (GER)	6	3	9
Frank Liles (USA)	7	–	–
Vinny Pazienza (USA)	8	–	–
Omar Sheika (USA)	9	–	–
Robin Reid (GB)	10	–	–
Andrei Shkalikov (RUS)	13	2	–
Manuel Siacca (PR)	–	5	–
Mike Makata (NZ)	–	8	–
Fredric Alvarez (SWE)	24	9	–
Charles Brewer (USA)	–	10	1
Thomas Tate (USA)	–	11	2
Glenn Johnson (USA)	20	–	4
Bryant Brannon (USA)	–	–	7
Tocker Pudwill (USA)	–	–	8
Sam Leuii (AUSTRL)	–	–	10

MIDDLEWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Keith Holmes (USA)	C	–	–
William Joppy (USA)	–	C	–
Bernard Hopkins (USA)	–	–	C
Robert McCracken (GB)	1	8	3
Antwun Echols (USA)	2	–	–
Hassine Cherifi (FRA)	3	–	9
Kevin Palmer (USA)	4	–	–
Davey Hilton (CAN)	5	10	4
Erland Betare (FRA)	6	–	–
Davide Ciarlante (ITA)	7	–	–
Howard Eastman (GB)	8	2	11
Lonnie Bradley (USA)	9	–	–
Johnson Tshuma (ZIM)	10	12	12
Rito Ruvalcaba (MEX)	–	1	7
Winky Wright (USA)	–	3	–
Antwun Echols (USA)	–	4	–
Darren Obah (AUSTRL)	–	5	–
Julio Cesar Green (DR)	–	6	–
Ramon Moyano (ARG)	19	7	–
Dana Rosenblatt (USA)	13	9	–
Antwun Echols (USA)	–	–	1
Vacant	–	–	2
Brian Barbosa (USA)	14	–	5
Andrew Council (USA)	17	–	6
Ali Ennebati (FRA)	11	–	8
Syd Vanderpool (CAN)	25	–	10

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Francisco Castillejo (SPA)	C	–	–
David Reid (USA)	–	C	–
Fernando Vargas (USA)	–	–	C
Tony Marshall (USA)	1	–	–
Mamadou Thiam (FRA)	2	1	–
Roman Karmazin (RUS)	3	8	–
Anthony Jones (USA)	4	10	–
Laurent Boudouani (FRA)	5	2	11
Tony Badea (ROM)	6	–	–
Alfred Ankamah (GHA)	7	–	–
Kevin Kelly (USA)	8	3	–
Akira Ohigashi (JAP)	9	–	–
Keith Mullings (USA)	10	–	–
Jose Luis Lopez (MEX)	–	4	–
Jose Flores (MEX)	–	5	–
Rodney Jones (USA)	15	6	10
Raul Frank (GUY)	–	7	–
Marcos Avendano (VEN)	–	9	–
Winky Wright (USA)	14	–	1
Ross Thompson (USA)	29	–	2
Earnie Artango (AUSTRL)	30	–	3
Bronco McKart (USA)	17	–	4
Emmett Linton (USA)	–	11	5
Yory Boy Campas (MEX)	19	–	6
Carl Daniels (USA)	11	12	7
Marshall Simpson (GUY)	–	–	8
Raul Marquez (USA)	–	–	9

WELTERWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Felix Trinidad (PR)	C	–	C
James Page (USA)	–	C	–
Oscar De La Hoya (USA)	1	1	–
Derrell Coley (USA)	2	–	7
Shannan Taylor (AUSTRL)	3	5	11
Vernon Forrest (USA)	4	6	4
Ike Quartey (GHA)	5	7	5
Nicolas Cervera (COL)	6	11	–
Hector Camacho Jr (USA)	7	–	–
Kofi Jantuah (GHA)	8	–	–
Carlos Baldomir (ARG)	9	10	–
Oba Carr (USA)	10	8	6
Andrew Lewis (GUY)	25	2	–
Andrei Pestraiev (RUS)	12	3	–
Michael Trabant (GERE)	26	4	–
Jeff Malcolm (AUS)	–	9	–
Raul Frank (USA)	–	–	1
Shane Mosley (USA)	–	–	2
Michael Covington (USA)	–	–	3
Sam Garr (USA)	17	–	8
Hugo Pineda (COL)	–	–	9
Sean Sullivan (AUSTRL)	–	–	10

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Kostya Tszyu (AUSTRL)	C	–	–
Sharmba Mitchell (USA)	–	C	–
Terron Millett (USA)	–	–	C
Julio Cesar Chavez (MEX)	1	–	–
Lawrence Ngobeni (SA)	2	–	–

Shane Mosley (USA)	3	–	–
Miguel Angel Gonzalez (MEX)	4	2	–
Diobelis Hurtado (CUB)	5	7	–
Oktay Urkal (TUR)	6	–	7
Jongkil Kim (KOR)	7	–	–
Thomas Damgaard (DEN)	8	3	–
Ahmed Santos (USA)	9	–	–
Mikhail Krivolapov (RUS)	10	–	–
Hector Camacho Jr (PR)	–	1	6
Khalid Rahilou (FRA)	–	4	–
Fred Pendleton (USA)	–	5	–
Gabriel Mapuoka (FRA)	22	6	11
Junichi Ono (JAP)	–	8	–
Elio Ortiz (VEN)	–	9	–
Demetrio Ceballos (PAN)	–	10	–
Zab Judah (USA)	–	–	1
Vacant	–	–	2
Jan Bergman (SA)	–	–	3
Allan Vester (DEN)	23	–	4
Cesar Leiva (ARG)	21	–	5
Vince Phillips (USA)	12	–	8
Hector Lopez (USA)	–	–	9
Ray Oliveira (USA)	–	–	10

LIGHTWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Steve Johnston (USA)	C	–	–
Gilbert Serrano (VEN)	–	C	–
Paul Spadafora (USA)	–	–	C
Billy Schwer (GB)	1	–	3
Cesar Bazan (MEX)	2	–	–
Lovemore Ndou (SA)	3	–	7
Yong Soo Choi (KOR)	4	–	–
Hiroyuki Sakamoto (JAP)	5	–	–
Rick Yoshimura (JAP)	6	5	–
Victoriano Damian Sosa (DR)	7	–	–
Daomai Sithkodam (THAI)	8	–	–
Djamel Lifa (FRA)	9	12	–
Gabriel Ruelas (USA)	10	–	–
Vacant	–	1	2
Alberto Sicurella (ARG)	17	2	–
Oscar Garcia Cano (SPA)	18	3	–
Julien Lorcy (FRA)	–	4	–
Stefano Zoff (ITA)	–	6	–
Jean-Baptiste Mendy (FRA)	12	7	–
Golden Johnson (USA)	–	8	–
Miguel Calist (PAN)	–	9	–
Raul Balbi (ARG)	–	10	–
Billy Irwin (CAN)	22	–	1
Israel Cardona (USA)	–	–	4
Renato Cornett (AUS)	–	–	5
George Scott (SWE)	–	–	6
Ivan Robinson (USA)	13	–	8
Joel Perez (USA)	–	–	9
Stephane Smith (GB)	–	–	10

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Floyd Mayweather (USA)	C	–	–
Jongkwon Baek (KOR)	–	C	–
Robert Garcia (USA)	–	12	C
Goyo Vargas (MEX)	1	–	–
Jesus Chavez (USA)	2	–	–
Derrick Gainer (USA)	3	5	2
Sirimongkol Singmanassuk (THAI)	4	–	–
Kengo Nagashima (JAP)	5	–	–
Dennis Holbaek (DEN)	6	7	9
Tiger Ari (PHIL)	7	–	–
Diego Corrales (USA)	8	–	1
Carlos Hernandez (EL SALV)	9	–	–
Justin Juuko (UGA)	10	–	–
Joel Casamayor (CUB)	–	1	–
Lakva Sim (MON)	–	2	–
Yodsanan Nanthachai (THAI)	–	3	–
Yong Soo Choi (KOR)	–	4	–
Tontcho Tontchev (BUL)	22	6	–
Takanori Hatakeyama (JAP)	–	8	–
Ernesto Zepeda (MEX)	28	9	–
Kyuchul Choi (KOR)	–	10	–
Carlos Gerena (PR)	14	–	3
Robbie Peden (AUSTRL)	–	–	4
Carlos Hernandez (USA)	–	–	5
Santos Rebolledo (VEN)	–	–	6
Harold Warren (USA)	–	–	7
John Brown (USA)	–	–	8
David Santos (USA)	–	–	10

FEATHERWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Cesar Soto (MEX)	C	–	–
Fred Norwood (USA)	–	C	–
Manuel Medina (MEX)	–	–	C
Luisito Espinosa (PHIL)	1	8	–
Takeo Imaoka (JAP)	2	–	–
Guty Espadas (MEX)	3	–	–
Injin Chi (KOR)	4	–	–
Pablo Chacon (ARG)	5	1	5
Takashi Koshimoto (JAP)	6	–	–
Edgar Barcenas (MEX)	7	–	–
Istvan Kovacs (HUN)	8	6	–
Tony Wehbee (AUS)	9	–	11
Augie Sanchez (USA)	10	–	12
Nana Konadu (GHA)	–	2	–
Victor Polo (COL)	–	3	–
Angel Vasquez (PR)	–	4	8
Philip Ndou (SA)	–	5	–
Frederic Perez (FRA)	22	7	–
Richard Carrillo (VEN)	–	9	–
Juan Manuel Marquez (MEX)	14	10	–
Vuyani Bungu (SA)	–	–	1
Vacant	–	–	2
Mbulelo Botile (SA)	–	–	3
Oscar Larios (MEX)	–	–	4
Jesus Chavez (USA)	–	–	6
Tracy Patterson (USA)	–	–	7
Hector Lizarraga (USA)	–	–	9
Frankie Toledo (USA)	–	–	10

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Erik Morales (MEX)	C	–	–
Nestor Garza (MEX)	–	C	–
Lehlo Ledwaba (SA)	–	–	C
Michael Brodie (GB)	1	7	3
Wayne McCullough (IRE)	2	–	–
Willie Jorrin (USA)	3	–	7
Sergei Devakov (UKR)	4	–	–
Oscar Larios (MEX)	5	–	–
Reynante Jamili (PHIL)	6	–	–
Ariston Clayton (USA)	7	–	–
Kennedy McKinney (USA)	8	–	–
John Johnson (USA)	9	8	10
Salim Medjkoune (FRA)	10	–	12
Antonio Cermeno (VEN)	–	1	–
Vladislav Antonov (RUS)	21	2	8
Bugiarso (INDO)	–	3	–
Yobert Ortega (VEN)	–	4	–
Enrique Sanchez (MEX)	11	5	–
Jose Luis Valbuena (VEN)	–	6	–
Guty Espadas (MEX)	–	9	–
Jose Rojas (VEN)	–	10	–
Ernesto Gray (COL)	–	–	1
Vacant	–	–	2
Andrian Kaspari (INDO)	–	–	4
Jesus Salud (USA)	–	–	5
Jason Pires (USA)	–	–	6
Sean Fletcher (USA)	–	–	9

BANTAMWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Veerapol Sahaprom (THAI)	C	–	–
Paul Ayala (USA)	–	C	–
Tim Austin (USA)	–	–	C
Adan Vargas (MEX)	1	2	7
Dario Azuaga (PAR)	2	–	5
Hugo Dianzo (MEX)	3	10	–
Cuauhtemoc Gomez (MEX)	4	7	–
Johnny Tapia (USA)	5	3	–
Jess Maca (PHIL)	6	11	–
Manny Pacquiao (PHIL)	7	–	–
Gerardo Martinez (MEX)	8	–	–
Cruz Carbajal (MEX)	9	–	–
Nana Konadu (GHA)	10	–	4
Vacant	–	1	–
Sahoiu Sithchai Condo (THAI)	–	4	–
Johnny Bredahl (DEN)	12	5	6
Danny Romero (USA)	14	6	–
Toshiaki Nishioka (JAP)	–	8	–
Rafael Marquez (MEX)	17	9	–
Bernardo Mendoza (CHI)	–	–	1
Jesus Perez (COL)	24	–	2
Jose Mendoza (COL)	–	–	3
Arthur Johnson (USA)	13	–	8
Pedro Rincon (COL)	–	–	9
Mauricio Martinez (PAN)	–	–	10

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
In Joo Cho (KOR)	C	–	–
Hideki Todaka (JAP)	–	C	–
Mark Johnson (USA)	–	–	C
Gerry Penalosa (PHIL)	1	11	3
Luis Bolanos (COL)	2	12	–
Joel Luna Zarate (MEX)	3	9	–
Eric Morel (USA)	4	–	–
Yokthai Sithoar (THAI)	5	3	10
Heriberto Ruiz (MEX)	6	–	11
Genaro Garcia (MEX)	7	–	–
Ricardo Barajas (MEX)	8	–	–
Dimitri Kirilov (RUS)	9	–	–
Masanori Tokuyama (JAP)	10	–	–
Leo Gamez (VEN)	–	1	–
Saen Sow Ploenchit (THAI)	–	2	4
Jesus Rojas (VEN)	21	4	–
Edison Torres (VEN)	–	5	–
Felix Machado (VEN)	–	6	2
Jesper Jensen (DEN)	–	7	–
Akihigo Nago (JAP)	–	8	–
Lester Fuentes (NIC)	23	10	–
Julio Gamboa (NIC)	28	–	1
Ratanachai Sor Voraphin (THAI)	20	–	5
Samson 3K-Battery (THAI)	–	–	6
Jose Rafael Sosa (ARG)	22	–	7
Evangelo Perez (PAN)	–	–	8
Med Lukchaopormasak (THAI)	–	–	9

FLYWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Medgoen 3K Battery (THAI)	C	–	–
Sornpichai Kratchingdaeng (THAI)	–	C	–
Irene Pacheco (COL)	–	–	C
Chatchai Sasakul (THAI)	1	–	–
Alex Ali Baba (GHA)	2	–	11
David Guerault (FRA)	3	5	1
Alejandro Montiel (MEX)	4	11	5
Panieng Sasiprabha Okuda (THAI)	5	–	–
Oscar Arciniega (MEX)	6	–	–
Gabriel Mira (MEX)	7	–	–
Mike Trejo (USA)	8	12	4
Saen Sor Ploenchit (THAI)	9	–	–
Alexander Mahmutov (RUS)	10	–	–
Jose Bonilla (VEN)	–	1	–
Gilberto Gonzalez (VEN)	–	2	10
Denkaosaen Kaowitch (THAI)	–	3	–
Panieng Okuda (THAI)	–	4	–
Eric Morel (USA)	–	6	–
Hugo Soto (ARG)	–	7	–
Jose Lopez (VEN)	–	8	–
Gabriel Munoz (MEX)	–	9	–
Gilberto Keb Baas (MEX)	13	10	–
Pedro Pena (USA)	29	–	2
Ferid Ben Jeddou (TUN)	–	–	3
Fernando Montiel (MEX)	–	–	6
Gerson Guerrero (MEX)	11	–	7
Isidro Garcia (USA)	12	–	8
Zoltan Lunka (TUR)	20	–	9

JR. FLYWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Saman Sorjaturong (THAI)	C	–	–
Pichitnoi C. Siriwat (THAI)	–	C	–
Will Grigsby (USA)	–	11	C
Yosam Choi (KOR)	1	–	–
Melchor Cob Castro (MEX)	2	3	–
Rosendo Alvarez (NIC)	3	1	2
Hidenobu Honda (JAP)	4	2	–
Bebis Mendoza (COL)	5	–	–
Ridchichai Kiatprabhas (THAI)	6	–	–
Oscar Andrade (MEX)	7	–	12
Sangik Yang (KOR)	8	–	–
Jose Luis Zepeda (MEX)	9	–	–
Gabriel Munoz (MEX)	10	–	–
Pongsaklek Nakornton (THAI)	–	4	–
Nelson Dieppa (DR)	18	5	7
Yura Dimas (MON)	–	6	–
Jose Sanjuanelo (COL)	–	7	–
Jake Matlala (SA)	–	8	–
Jorge Arce (MEX)	–	9	–
Ratanapol Sor Vorapin (THAI)	–	10	4
Pedro Rodriguez (COL)	–	–	1
Anis Roga (INDO)	–	–	3
Ricardo Lopez (MEX)	–	–	5
Asdrubal Velasquez (COL)	–	–	6
Osvaldo Guerrero (MEX)	12	–	8
Medngon 3K Battery (THAI)	–	–	9
Carlos Murillo (PAN)	–	–	10

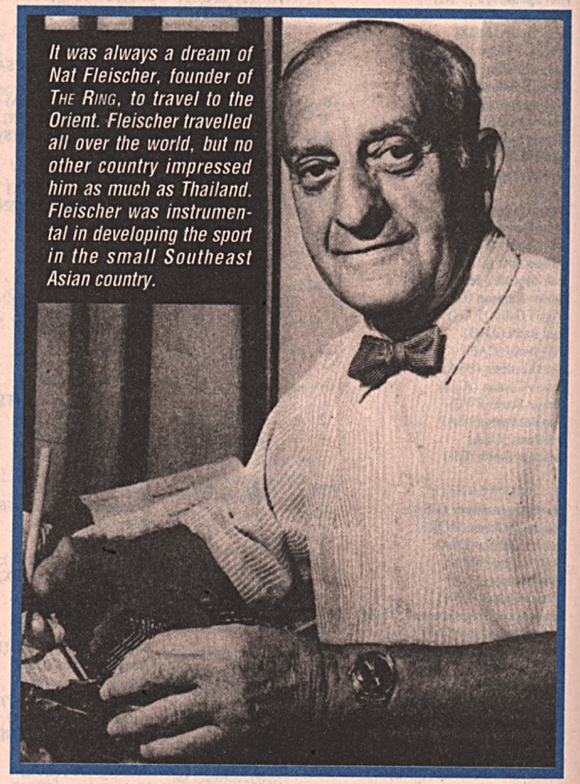
STRAWWEIGHTS	WBC	WBA	IBF
Wandee Chor Chareon (THAI)	C	–	–
Noel Arumbulet (VEN)	–	C	–
Zolani Petelo (SA)	–	–	C
Jose Antonio Aguirre (MEX)	1	10	–
Andy Tabanas (PHIL)	2	–	2
Daniel Reyes (COL)	3	6	6
Satoru Abe (JAP)	4	4	–
Erdene Chuluun (MON)	5	–	–
Joma Gamboa (PHIL)	6	7	–
Yasuo Tokimitsu (JAP)	7	–	–
Udomdet Porpaoin (THAI)	8	8	–
Hiroshi Nakajima (JAP)	9	–	8
Fernando Luna (MEX)	10	–	–
Jose Garcia (COL)	–	1	–
Hurricane Chulun (IND)	–	2	–
Songkram Porpaoin (THAI)	–	3	–
Chana Porpaoin (THAI)	–	5	–
Hiroshi Matsumoto (JAP)	23	9	–
Luis Lazarte (ARG)	–	–	1
Mickey Cantwell (GB)	–	–	3
Rocky Palma (JAP)	–	–	4
Faisol Akbar (INDO)	–	–	5
Alberto Rossel (PERU)	–	–	7
Rocky Lim (TWN)	–	–	9
Juan Herrera (COL)	–	–	10

CLASSIC

A DREAM COME TRUE

By Nat Fleischer

Thailand is enjoying a boxing boom. The Southeast Asian country currently has three world champions in WBC flyweight king Sot Chitalada, WBA junior bantamweight boss Khaosai Galaxy, and WBC junior featherweight titlist Samart Payakaroon. However, Thailand is hardly a Johnny-come-lately in its love for the Manly Art. Kick boxing (Muay Thai) is the national sport, and many of their top "international style" boxers come out of that rough-and-tumble school of fighting. In an effort to give readers an understanding of boxing's roots in Thailand, we are reprinting a chapter from ***50 Years At Ring*** *by Nat Fleischer, who played a substantial role in developing the sport in that distant land.*



It was always a dream of Nat Fleischer, founder of THE RING, *to travel to the Orient. Fleischer travelled all over the world, but no other country impressed him as much as Thailand. Fleischer was instrumental in developing the sport in the small Southeast Asian country.*

As a youngster, I thought that traveling in the Orient was reserved for books and dreams—or Marco Polo. Yet as a grown man I found myself in the land of my dreams. I may say now that my childhood fancies did not measure up to the dazzling reality: the violent contrasts of fabulous wealth and unbelievable squalor; the customs so strange to me; the glorious color of temples and palaces; the beautifully exotic land itself.

Early in 1954, I received a cable from Brigadier General Pichai Kullavanijya inviting me to visit Bangkok as the guest of the Thailand government for a world bantamweight championship fight that had been arranged for May 2 between Jimmy Carruthers of Australia, the titleholder, and Chamrern Songkitrat, Orient champion, a young Thai sub-lieutenant of police. I accepted, and when I left for the scene of action, it was my first flying trip around the world. I have since taken several.

The trip was an eventful one, but it was Thailand, more than any other country I visited, that impressed me. Its beautiful temples; its barefooted priests with their yellow loose robes, an umbrella in one hand and a bag of food in the other; naked children roaming the roads; people of many races crowding the colorful market places; three-wheeled vehicles jamming the streets with their fares—they left an impression I shall never forget.

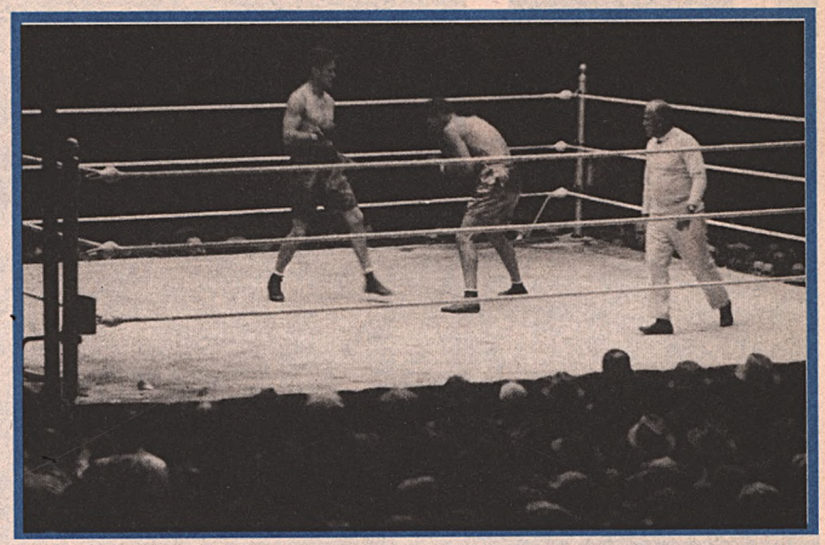
Let me tell you about the stage setting for the two championship bouts I saw there. In a scene unparalleled in ring history, a scene that was reminiscent of the historic Dempsey-Tunney world heavyweight championship bout in Philadelphia, a gathering of 59,760 persons paid 5,000,700 ticals, or $227,304.90 in American money, to see Carruthers retain his throne by a hairline margin and, following his victory, announce his retirement. Unlike championship bouts in other countries, this one was limited to 12 rounds. I arranged it so.

Those who witnessed the Dempsey-Tunney contest in Philadelphia can imagine what we encountered in Bangkok by picturing a tropical storm that started three days before the fight, drenched the spectators who braved it, made a lake out of the ring, and flooded the muddy streets over which thousands trekked to the National Stadium.

Bulbs from the overhead lighting system crashed to the canvas from time to time, forcing temporary halts to the fight while a broom brigade I had organized swept the glass and water from the ring. It was the first championship fight staged in that country, and the sports loving folk of that little kingdom went all out to see it. As the guest of the Thailand government, I was appointed overseer of the affair, and in view of the unbelievable conditions, I granted permission for the boxers to enter the ring in their bare feet to lessen the danger by making the footing more firm.

I had never seen anything like it before. Dignitaries from Thailand and other nations, most of them dressed in their native garb; nobility from many lands; fight fans who came to the scene by foot, bicycle, tricycle, horseback, auto, train, and wagon—a reminder of the picturesque scenes portrayed in stories of bare-knuckle fights in England—all headed for the Stadium, the national sports arena. Traffic was so congested that it took me more than an hour to cover less than a mile from the Government Resident Palace, where I lived for a month, to the arena.

The mass of humanity, trudging through the streets unmindful of the adverse conditions or the ruin of their colorful garments, was a picture to behold: the varicolored holiday dress of the Siamese, Hindus, Japanese, Chinese, and other Asiatics in contrast to the conventional Western dress of the Australians and Americans, many of whom were from our government agencies.



Fleischer's experience during the first title fight ever held in Thailand reminded him of the historic Jack Dempsey-Gene Tunney heavyweight title fight in Philadelphia on September 23, 1926. Both fights took place outside in horrid, rainy conditions.

Between weighing-in time and the fight, thousands visited the Emerald Buddha Temple where the scene was most impressive. Hundreds gathered within its walls. We knelt in prayer with shoes parked outside—the native custom. When I emerged, the rain was coming down so heavily that I pleaded with Carruthers to have the fight postponed, but he wouldn't think of it.

"Let's get it over with," he said. "I'll take my chances."

Since I had the final decision, I held a confab with the principals and the government officials, and it was decided that a postponement would be dangerous. Because of the housing shortage it would be impossible to care for the many visitors. The bout went on. We called it "The Battle Of The Typhoon."

In spite of an army raincoat I had borrowed, the water flowed down my body, yet I enjoyed the affair more than any I had ever witnessed. When the fight was over, before we were able to get to the military car that had been assigned to me, we walked almost knee-deep through a sea of mud for half a mile, and when we got to the Resident Palace, my suit had shrunk to such an extent that my valet found it necessary to slit the trousers to remove them. I couldn't use my shoes and coat again.

When the contest was over, Referee Bill Henneberry of Australia, the only official, quietly raised the hand of Carruthers, "the winner and still champion."

It was a very close affair, and many in the vast arena booed the verdict. Never having attended a fight in the Orient before, I was expecting a riot momentarily. But fast thinking on the part of the defeated young boxer turned what might have been a disaster into a wild ovation.

Chamrern quickly took the microphone from the announcer, held up his hand for silence, and standing in mid-ring he said in his native tongue:

"My dear friends, I am proud to have been able to bring fame to my country by being the first Thai boxer to contend for the world bantamweight championship and I am personally satisfied that the decision was fair and beyond doubt. If I am not sorry, my friends and countrymen, why are you?"

From THE RING, June 1987

THE RING RATINGS, June 1987

Antonio Esparragoza

HEAVYWEIGHTS
World Champ: Michael Spinks, St. Louis, MO
1. **Mike Tyson**, Catskill, NY
2. **Pinklon Thomas**, Wyandotte, MI
3. **James Smith**, Magnolia, NC
4. **Tim Witherspoon**, Philadelphia, PA
5. **Tony Tubbs**, Cincinnati, OH
6. **Trevor Berbick**, Canada
7. **James Douglas**, Columbus, OH
8. **Tony Tucker**, Grand Rapids, MI
9. **Terrell Biggs**, Philadelphia, PA
10. **Frank Bruno**, England

CRUISERWEIGHTS
World Champ: Carlos DeLeon, Puerto Rico
1. **Evander Holyfield**, Atlanta, GA
2. **Ricky Parkey**, Morristown, NJ
3. **Dwight Muhammad Qawi**, Camden, NJ
4. **Bert Cooper**, Philadelphia, PA
5. **Henry Tillman**, Los Angeles, CA
6. **Lee Roy Murphy**, Chicago, IL
7. **John Odhiambo**, Uganda
8. **Bernard Benton**, Detroit, MI
9. **Alfonzo Ratliff**, Chicago, IL
10. **Eddie Mustafa Muhammad**, Brooklyn, NY

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
World Champ: Vacant
1. **Marvin Johnson**, Indianapolis. IN
2. **Bobby Czyz**, Wanaque, NJ
3. **Thomas Hearns**, Detroit, MI
4. **Dennis Andries**, England
5. **Slobodan Kacar**, Yugoslavia
6. **Eddie Davis**, Freeport, NY
7. **Juan D. Roldan**, Argentina
8. **Leslie Stewart**, Trinidad
9. **Willie Edwards**, Detroit, MI
10. **Virgil Hill**, Grand Forks, ND

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
World Champ: Marvin Hagler, Brockton, MA
1. **Herol Graham**, England
2. **Iran Barkley**, Bronx, NY
3. **Michael Olajide**, Canada
4. **Robbie Sims**, Brockton, MA
5. **James Kinchen**, San Diego, CA
6. **Milton McCrory**, Detroit, MI
7. **Michael Nunn**, Sherman Oaks, CA
8. **Lindell Holmes**, Detroit, MI
9. **Frank Tate**, Houston, TX
10. **Tim Williams**, San Diego, CA

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS
World Champ: Vacant
1. **Duane Thomas**, Detroit, MI
2. **Mike McCallum**, New York, NY
3. **Buster Drayton**, Philadelphia, PA
4. **John Mugabi**, Uganda
5. **Matthew Hilton**, Canada
6. **Donald Curry**, Fort Worth, TX
7. **Carlos Santos**, Puerto Rico
8. **Davey Moore**, Bronx, NY
9. **Julian Jackson**, Virgin Islands
10. **Mark Medal**, Jersey City, NJ

WELTERWEIGHTS
World Champ: Lloyd Honeyghan, England
1. **Mark Breland**, Brooklyn, NY
2. **Maurice Blocker**, Washington, D.C.
3. **Marlon Starling**, Hartford, CT
4. **Tommy Ayers**, Cincinnati, OH
5. **Simon Brown**, Washington, D.C.
6. **Tyrone Trice**, Detroit, MI
7. **Johnny Bumphus**, Mt. Laurel, NJ
8. **Luis Santana**, Hawthorne, CA
9. **Jun-Sok Hwang**, Korea
10. **Gene Hatcher**, Ft. Worth, TX

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS
World Champ: Vacant
1. **Patrizio Oliva**, Italy
2. **Tsuyoshi Hamada**, Japan
3. **Frankie Warren**, Corpus Christi, TX
4. **Rene Arredondo**, Mexico
5. **Terry Marsh**, England
6. **Andy Nance**, San Rafael, CA
7. **Joe Manley**, Detroit, MI
8. **Harold Brazier**, South Bend, IN
9. **Ronnie Shields**, Port Arthur, TX
10. **James (Buddy) McGirt**, Brentwood, NY

LIGHTWEIGHTS
World Champ: Vacant
1. **Edwin Rosario**, Puerto Rico
2. **Hector Camacho**, New York, NY
3. **Greg Haugen**, Auburn, WA
4. **Jimmy Paul**, Detroit, MI
5. **Livingstone Bramble**, Passaic, NJ
6. **Joe Luis Ramirez**, Mexico
7. **Terrence Alli**, New York, NY
8. **Meldrick Taylor**, Philadelphia, PA
9. **Pernell Whitaker**, Norfolk, VA
10. **Cornelius Boza-Edwards**, Uganda

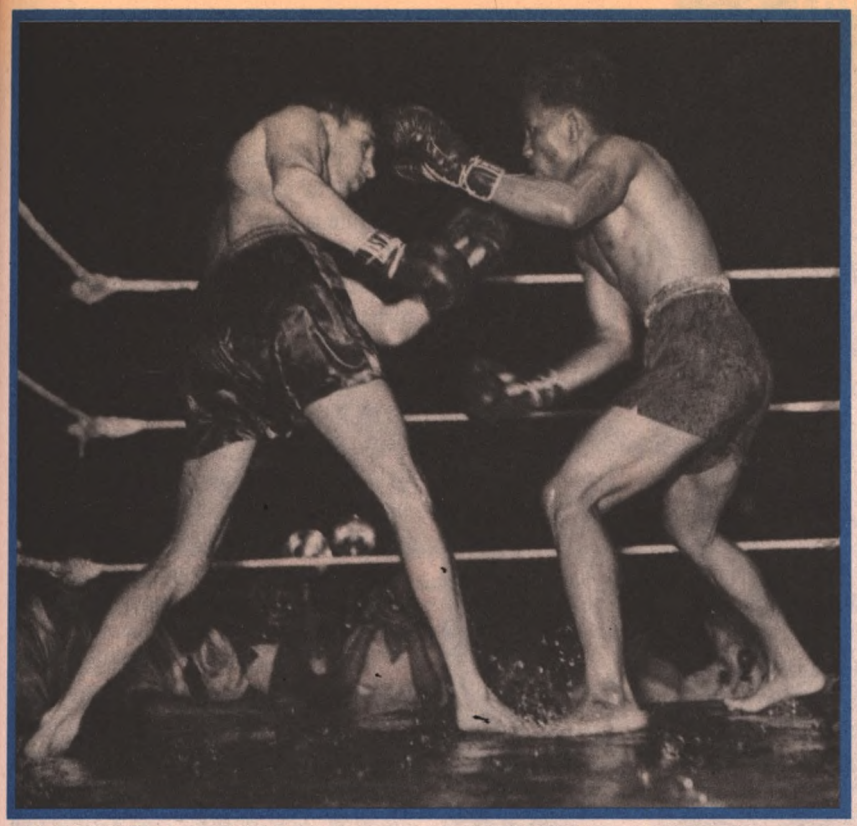
JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS
World Champ: Brian Mitchell, South Africa
1. **Julio Cesar Chavez**, Mexico
2. **Barry Michael**, Australia
3. **Juan LaPorte**, Puerto Rico
4. **Rocky Lockridge**, Maple Shade, NJ
5. **Mario Martinez**, Mexico
6. **Alfredo Layne**, Panama
7. **Mario Miranda**, Colombia
8. **Dennis Cruz**, Bronx, NY
9. **Johnny de la Rosa**, Detroit, MI
10. **Kenny Baysmore**, Washington, D.C.

FEATHERWEIGHTS
World Champ: Antonio Esparragoza, Venezuela
1. **Azumah Nelson**, Ghana
2. **Steve Cruz**, Fort Worth, TX
3. **Barry McGuigan**, Ireland
4. **Antonio Rivera**, Mexico
5. **Calvin Grove**, Pottstown, PA
6. **Bernard Taylor**, Knoxville, TN
7. **Marcos Villasana**, Mexico
8. **Jose Marmolejo**, Panama
9. **Ki-Yung Chung**, Korea
10. **Mauro Gutierrez**, Mexico

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS
World Champ: Vacant
1. **Samart Payakaroon**, Thailand
2. **Louie Espinosa**, Phoenix, AZ
3. **Victor Callejas**, Puerto Rico
4. **Loris Stecca**, Italy
5. **Daniel Zaragoza**, Mexico
6. **Harold Petty**, Fort Worth, TX
7. **Darrell Thigpen**, Los Angeles, CA
8. **Jaime Garza**, Los Angeles, CA
9. **Juan (Kid) Meza**, Mexico
10. **James Pipps**, Vidor, TX

BANTAMWEIGHTS
World Champ: Bernardo Pinango, Venezuela
1. **Miguel Lora**, Colombia
2. **Khaosai Galaxy**, Thailand
3. **Gilberto Roman**, Mexico
4. **Jiro Wantanabe**, Japan
5. **Gaby Canizales**, Laredo, TX
6. **Greg Richardson**, Youngstown, OH
7. **Albert Davila**, Pomona, CA
8. **Kelvin Seabrooks**, Charlotte, NC
9. **Santos Laciar**, Argentina
10. **Frankie Duarte**, Los Angeles, CA

FLYWEIGHTS
World Champ: Sot Chitalada, Thailand
1. **Jung-Koo Chang**, Korea
2. **Fidel Bassa**, Colombia
3. **Myung-Woo Yuh**, Korea
4. **Hilario Zapata**, Panama
5. **Dodie Penalosa**, Philippines
6. **Paul Gonzales**, Los Angeles, CA
7. **Gabriel Bernal**, Mexico
8. **Isidro Perez**, Mexico
9. **Benedicto Murillo**, Panama
10. **Alberto Castro**, Colombia



It rained for three days before Jimmy Carruthers of Australia and Orient champion Chamrern Songkitrat met for the world bantamweight title in 1954. The torrential rains made a small lake out of the ring, forcing Carruthers and Songkitrat to fight barefoot for better traction.

The sportsmanlike remark was greeted with thunderous applause, and eventually restored decorum. At a banquet the following day, General Phao Sriyanonda, Director General of the National Police and later Thailand's Prime Minister, presented Songkitrat with an advanced rank in the Police Department, and to me he gave a handsome silver cocktail set.

A few months after Carruthers had announced his retirement, the Thailand government again requested that I act on its behalf in arranging a bout to obtain Carruthers' successor. Since Songkitrat had already gone 12 rounds with Carruthers, and Robert Cohen of France was recognized throughout the world as the leading challenger, I brought the pair together with the consent of the European Boxing Federation, the New York Commission, and the National Boxing Association. The story of how that bout was arranged is well worth telling.

With the crown vacant, the Thailand government contacted me while I was in London and requested that I offer Cohen 10,000 pounds sterling, tax free, with all expenses for himself and his managers, if he would agree to meet Songkitrat for the title. Before starting negotiations, as a member of the Advisory Board of the World Boxing Championship Committee, I contacted its members and obtained their consent. Then I did the same with the European Boxing Federation, the New York Commission, and the National Boxing Association, and when I got the green light from all, I flew to Paris to see Cohen's manager. He asked me to discuss the matter with his partner, Robert Diamond, in London.

With the guarantee agreement set, I drew up a contract that called for the contest to be staged on September 19, 1954, in Bangkok, with Teddy Waltham, secretary of the British Boxing Board of Control, as neutral referee at a fee of $1,000. A Thai official and myself were to act as judges. With this set, and accompanied by Diamond, I went to the Thailand Embassy in London, and there the Ambassador

The first world title fight fought in Thailand ended in a narrow victory for Carruthers. After the decision was read, it was greeted with lusty boos from the Thai fans. Songkitrat calmed the crowd by telling them he was "personally satisfied that the decision was fair."

affixed his signature on behalf of his government, Diamond signed for Cohen, and I signed for the World Boxing Championship Committee.

Thus for the first time in the history of boxing, an Ambassador signed a contract for a boxing match. I was proud of my achievement and prouder still of the manner in which the affair was handled.

Boxing received its greatest recognition in recent years when Their Majesties King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirkt, the Thai cabinet, ambassadors and ministers from foreign countries, with high-ranking officers from the Allied Forces stationed in the Far East, all sat in a specially constructed grandstand to watch the fight—despite another torrential rain that kept up until about half an hour before the bout went on.

A gathering of 69,819 that paid $200,952.24 saw the Thai champion go down to defeat.

On the day of the fight, despite another heavy tropical rain storm, as before, all roads leading to the battleground were jammed throughout the day. People headed for the stadium on foot and in vehicles of various sorts, and to take care of the heavy traffic, 2,000 police and members of the armed forces were brought in from the provinces to help the Bangkok force. People from the bordering countries of Cambodia and Laos crowded streets already full of Chinese, Hindus, Filipinos, and Siamese.

The day following the bout, General Phao gave a dinner in my honor at which the French Ambassador and many government notables were present. At this affair His Majesty awarded me the Fourth Class of the Most Exalted Order of the White Elephant, the highest honor that may be conferred on a foreigner. The white elephant is a sacred animal in the land of Buddha, and Buddhism is Thailand's national religion. It is sacrilegious to kill a white elephant—the symbol of purity.

I shall always recall the wonderful greeting I received on this second visit to Bangkok. As our Pan-American plane approached the field, we could see hundreds of children waving American and Thai banners, and as the plane landed, a roar went up. It was as much a surprise to me as it was to the others to hear Captain Max Webber announce:

"Will all passengers kindly remain seated while a guest of the Thai government gets off the plane first." That guest, I soon learned, was me. As I stepped out of the plane, General Pichai and General Mora headed a large delegation of government officials who had come to escort me. There was a military escort of motorcycles and jeeps, followed by 50 cars and buses, each flying the American and Thailand flags, and banners blazing the worlds "Welcome Our Uncle Nat Back to Thailand."

At dinner that evening, General Pichai asked if I would like to see Siamese boxing. What a question!

What baseball is to Americans, hand-and-feet fighting is to the Thai folk. It's a sport in which the rules and regulations that govern international boxing are tossed aside. The code that governs it prohibits gouging, hair-pulling, and striking an opponent when he is down—otherwise, everything goes. The contestants use their feet, knees, and elbows as offensive and defensive weapons, and once the action gets underway, fur flies. The bouts are usually thrillers, with not a moment of inactivity.

The foreign visitor watching a Siamese boxing match is not so much attracted by the hand-and-feet fighting as by the opening ceremony that often lasts from five to 10 minutes. It is called "Ram."

It is a peculiar combination of praying, limbering-up exercises, an acknowledgment to the fans for their presence, and a salute to the opponent, instead of the usual handshake to which we are accustomed. The fighters first bow until their heads touch the ground. This is when the prayer to Buddha is made. Then each fighter twists his head toward his manager's corner with another prayer, this time for the man who has trained the fighter. Next comes a salaam to the crowd. Then with head still bowed in reverence and with hand upraised toward heaven, the fighters recite a prayer for victory. The final stage of the ceremony is that in which the fighters prance around the ring like toe dancers and shadowbox as they have been taught by their masters. They move their hands in

Thailand has become a major source of world champions in the lighter classes. Thailand had a couple of ring heroes in the mid-1980s with Hall of Fame WBA junior bantamweight champ Khaosai Galaxy (above) and WBC flyweight boss Sot Chitalada (below).

mystic waves, kicking their legs high, then each goes to the other's corner and bows to his opponent.

A band of six musicians plays during this ceremonial prelude, and continues to play throughout the fight. The weird music is reminiscent of medieval days. And the entire "Ram" rites, I was informed, may be compared to the ceremonies attending the opening of athletic tournaments in the 15th and 16th centuries.

With the conclusion of the ceremonies, the fighters are called to the ring center where the action gets underway. The referee calls for time, and as soon as the fight gets underway, six musicians begin their quaint music with two high-pitched guitars, two oriental drums, and two flutes. This accompaniment is nerve-wracking to an American. Those accustomed to it would regard a match dull without it. The tempo speeds up as the bout progresses, and the action in the ring remains rhythmic as the boxers keep pace with the musicians.

The Siamese boys make our boxers look like novices so far as their courage and ability to take punishment are concerned. They take a shellacking, giving and receiving blows, and European rules would call for quick disqualification. ■

The Cover: THE RING posed an important question about lightweight contender Vinny "The Pazmanian Devil" Pazienza: Did he have enough appeal outside his Providence, Rhode Island, community to be a star? NBC certainly thought so. "There are fighters that go beyond the hardcore boxing fans and appeal to the casual sports fan ... Pazienza seems to be one," NBC's Kevin Monaghan said.

Bone-afide Bummer: Mike Tyson and James "Bonecrusher" Smith engaged in a 12-round snoozer, with the 20-year-old "Iron Mike" winning a decision to add the WBA heavyweight title to the WBC belt he already held. Smith was content just to last the 12 rounds, holding Tyson throughout the bout. Referee Mills Lane penalized Smith in the second and eighth rounds for excessive holding.

Reaching The Inevitable: Mark Breland won the world title many had predicted for the 1984 Olympic gold medalist since he first attracted attention as a five-time New York Golden Gloves winner. Breland won the vacant WBA welterweight crown by defeating overmatched South African Harold Volbrecht.

An Unknown Champion: THE RING profiled WBA junior lightweight champion Brian Mitchell as part of a series that featured boxing's lesser-known champions. Mitchell spoke about winning the title from Alfredo Layne and how he wished Jacob Morake could have been there. Morake died of a brain hemorrhage after Mitchell knocked him out in November 1985.

Fighter Of The Month: Evander Holyfield scored a seventh-round knockout of former Olympic teammate Henry Tillman in his first defense of the WBA cruiserweight title. After the bout, "The Real Deal" responded to questions about moving up to heavyweight. "Now is not the time," Holyfield said.

LOOKING AHEAD

By Eric Raskin

CAN "CHICO" BE THE MAN?

Prior to October 23, 1999, the answer to the question, "Who's the best junior lightweight in the world?" was a no-brainer: **Floyd Mayweather**. No doubt about it.

Now, the answer's still the same, but the delivery of the response has changed. Before you blurt out Mayweather's name, you're forced to hesitate for a moment, as images of a certain undefeated six-foot-tall Californian pass through your mind. **Diego "Chico" Corrales** has not yet done enough to warrant being rated above "Pretty Boy Floyd," but with a convincing knockout of **Roberto Garcia** to win the IBF title and a one-sided first defense against tough **John Brown** under his belt, Corrales has to be considered a threat to Mayweather's supremacy atop the 130-pound ranks.

Corrales: Has Gainer and Mayweather in his sights

But Corrales, 30-0 (24), isn't content with just being a threat. He wants to be recognized as the number-one guy at junior lightweight, and the only way to do that is to defeat Mayweather.

"I would love to fight Floyd Mayweather in 2000," the humble yet self-confident Corrales said. "Now is definitely the right time to fight him. I know Floyd's a great fighter and I can't take him lightly, but I do believe I have what it takes to beat him. I have to land punches in between his shots and be more conscious of using my reach advantage. There are times I'm going to have to take shots to give shots. But I'm willing to do that, and I don't think anyone's ever tested his chin like I will."

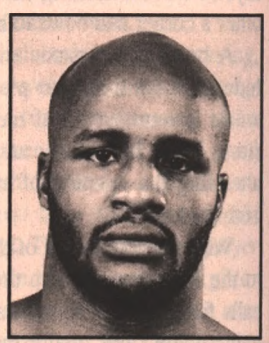
But first, Corrales is scheduled for a defense on HBO that is much more than just a formality. He's taking on dangerous **Derrick "Smoke" Gainer** on April Fool's Day, and he knows he'd be playing the part of the fool if he looks past Gainer.

"He's fast, he's gonna move a lot," Corrales said of Gainer, "but he won't be able to run forever. I think his chin is a little bit suspect. And he's 5'8", so he's used to being taller than his opponents, but I expect my height to confuse him. He's going to have to come to me."

The Corrales-Gainer fight will be a co-feature to Mayweather's mandatory defense of the WBC title against **Goyo Vargas**. If both champions come away with their titles intact, look for a unification bout to erase all doubts about who's the best at 130 before the year is out.

LISTEN UP

The **Oscar De La Hoya-Derrell Coley** show at Madison Square Garden on February 26 will include two intriguing undercard bouts. One is a battle of former world champions between **Arturo Gatti** and **Joey Gamache**, which will be part of the HBO broadcast, while the untelevised portion of the show will include a fight between unbeaten heavyweight prospects **Lamon Brewster** and **Shazzon Bradley** ... The two American lightweight champions, **Stevie Johnston** and **Paul Spadafora**, may be trading spots, network-wise, in the coming months. Spadafora, a regular on ESPN2, is being considered by HBO for an April defense against mandatory challenger **Billy Irwin**, while Johnston, who fought on HBO twice in '99, will defend on *Friday Night Fights* in his hometown of Denver on March 17. Possible opponents for Johnston as of press time included **Carlos Gerena** of Puerto Rico and **Victoriano Sosa** of the Dominican Republic ... Promoters in China are looking to bring women's boxing to their country for the first time, and they're aiming to do it with two of the biggest names in the sport. As we went to press, both **Laila Ali** (daughter of **Muhammad**) and **Jacqui Frazier-Lyde** (daughter of **Smokin' Joe**) were negotiating to appear in separate bouts on an April 22 show in Beijing headlined by **Hector Camacho** ... A rematch to the controversial 1996 bout between light heavyweights **Dariusz Michalczewski** and **Graciano Rocchigiani**, which Michalczewski won by disqualification, is slated for April 15 in Koln, Germany ... Two-time former heavyweight champion **Michael Moorer** is reportedly back in the gym, preparing to return to the ring in February or March. The guess here, though, is that with the younger heavyweights starting to take over and the comebacks of guys like **Oliver McCall** and **Ray Mercer** not drawing much interest, it's going to be difficult for Moorer to reestablish himself as a significant player. ■



Moorer: Back after two-year hiatus

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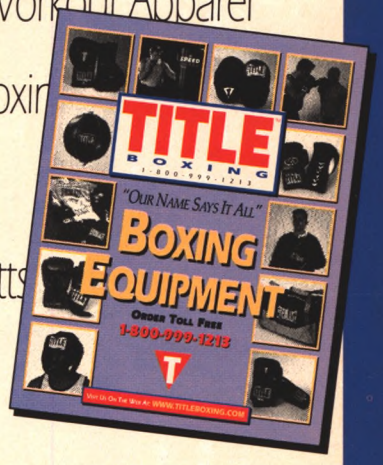

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